

THE SEAMY SIDE

A STORY OF THE
TRUE CONDITIONS OF
THINGS THEATRICAL



BY ONE WHO HAS
SPENT TWENTY YEARS
AMONG THEM

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“It is a beautiful ART, but it's the —est
BUSINESS any one ever got up against.”

The Seamy Side

**A Story of the True Con-
dition of Things
Theatrical**

by
Percy Ives

**By One Who Has Spent Twenty
Years Among Them**

PERCY IVES PUBLISHING CO.
BOSTON, MASS.

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*DEDICATED IN ALL KINDNESS AND
SINCERITY TO THE
STAGE-STRUCK
GIRL.*

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PROLOGUE.

That awful look of soul rending despair in Juliet's eyes, as, with her hand on his heart, she realized that her Romeo was dead in her arms, held me as a bird is held by the eyes of a snake. Even when I saw her plunge the dagger into her breaking heart and when she had fallen prone and lifeless over his body, those eyes, in that one dreadful moment of realization haunted me until the curtain, slowly descending, hid them from my view.

I sat as one stunned; and my aunt gently shook my arm, as she gathered up our wraps and said the play was over and we must prepare to leave the theatre. All about us, voices were buzzing common place phrases such as:

"Wasn't it good?" "Isn't she fine?" "She's all right." "Grand play." "I always did like that Shakespeare." But every new prosaic expression irritated more than the last, and I was glad to break from my lethargy and hurry with my people to the open air, where I breathed a sigh of relief when we were finally out of hearing and on the quiet road which led towards home. Aunt Julia and Uncle Neil, who always designated me as "that queer child," now evidently felt I was in one

of my silent moods and had the good grace to say no word during our homeward ride, and I sank back in the family carryall and communed joyously with my enthralled, enraptured senses.

For the first time since my good relatives had taken me, a poor orphan, to their peaceful, unpretentious home, a really great actress had visited our small city. We had heard so much about her for years, it seemed to me, that our town's people loyally turned out in a full house to do her homage. I had been something of a student of the old classics, but never had I had the opportunity of seeing one presented on the stage, and to-night, this great celebrity had given us immortal Shakespeare's Juliet. I had lived with this sweet Italian, lovelorn maiden, in my imagination, since childhood, and to-night, she stood before me in flesh and blood; palpitating with all the life and passion her great creator had bestowed upon her. I lived with her in Verona; I laughed, I danced, I loved, I suffered there; nay, I lived not with her, but as herself; her soul was mine, and all her wild emotions.

All night through I lived the scenes over again and again. The lights that dazzled the eye now danced before me; in a brilliant pageant those gorgeous costumes of the medieval period, worn with such picturesque grace by these lords and ladies great, moved again before my greedy eyes; the strange musical sound of the voices, as the rich blank verse came trippingly from their tongues, surged in my enchanted ears like the magic music of the sea.

And Verona's fairest daughter: how full of grace and beauty; how lovely even in her sorrow! how gaily she danced; how sweetly she loved; how nobly she died for love. It was as the breath of a new life to me, such a sensation as one might receive if he could be suddenly transported to another planet and find there all his youthful fancies of fairies and genii fully realized. I dreaded to have the morning break, lest the prosaic day would drive the dream pictures from my mind.

Then, slowly, I lost Juliet in the personality of the woman who had interpreted her, and vaguely I found myself wondering if she were really a human being like my everyday self. If so, what must be her bliss, her exaltation each night to live that beautiful heroine's life, feeling her joys and sorrows anew, and, above all, knowing a vast throng was listening with beating, throbbing hearts, pulsating in sympathy with her every word. Oh, what must not be the glory of such a calling! Here was not only the exquisite pleasure of expressing the character's emotions amid poetic environment, but also that of swaying a multitude, of making a great throng laugh, cry, feel, live with you; it must indeed be the ascending of all transcendental spheres.

To breakfast next morning was to wound my soaring spirit; so, putting on a soft white gown, after I had perfunctorily aided in the morning duties about the house and taking the Shakespeare from its shelf in the dark parlor, I slipped down to the

meadow where stood a great, lone horse-chestnut tree just beginning to leaf, with a sweet little brook trickling roguishly at its feet. The brook should be my audience; the tree my scenery; and the soft green sward my stage; and I would be "Juliet" in all her lovely expression of life, and try the sensations of the artist.

I found I scarcely needed the book to prompt me, so often had I read the beautiful verse, and gathering a bunch of early wild flowers, I made my entrance into the great old raftered hall and sank at my mother's feet. The people of Verona were soon about me, their voices answering me in Shakespeare's lofty lines; and soon I was tripping the minuet, making up what steps I could not remember as they had been danced the night before, and profoundly bowing to my partner of air and imagination with every third or fourth beat as I hummed the stately Mozart Melody.

I met Romeo. Our eyes read each other's hearts, and I dropped my bouquet of cowslips. I was compelled to pick it up myself, as my airy partner failed to do his share, but imagination made my hands his; I gave him the gentle encouraging look that the lady of the performance had bestowed upon this cavalier, and he followed me to the balcony of our baronial hall. We spoke together the dialogue of the Pilgrim's kiss, and the good old nurse called me away. I next begged of her the names of our visitors, and she sounded the first note of sorrow to my heart when

she brought me word that my stranger was of the house of my great enemy.

I mooned and sighed on the Capulet balcony, the elevation being indicated by standing upon a particularly inviting and well-knarled root which protruded from the ground at the foot of the tree.

At last I become lost in my impersonation. The brook, the sward, the tree, all vanish. I am in Capulet's house; my gown is long and clinging; the room I stand in, old and atmospheric. The soft glow from a massive fireplace falls half way across the heavily carpeted floor, and at the window a soft blue light, just tinged with amber, tells of the breaking day. My love is leaving me, banished from Verona by its cruel Prince, yet I cannot let him go. He must "write to me every day, every hour, for in a minute there are many days." Clinging to him, I feel him slip from my arms and descend the slender rope ladder, and then I lose even sight of him as he is hidden by the brush and flowers in the garden below. My mother is standing near me now and tells me of another marriage I must make. She knows not why I refuse, but my heart will not let me be untrue. My father storms and rails; I try to plead; but he is obdurate. I fly for comfort to my ghostly confessor, and he gives me the first ray of light my grief clouded senses have known since the awful sentence has been passed upon my Romeo. I hasten home to take the sleeping draught he has prepared, out of whose stupor I am to awake and find my true love near me; but

my courage fails me. I conjure up the dread and horror of such an act which will, for some hours, place me in our family vault. The failure of my Romeo to return, the fearful sights which must meet my vision, if, waking before he arrives, I find myself alone in that ancient sepulchre, are startling thoughts. I become frantic, wild; my mind loses its quality to think, to reason, to understand, and I see before me now only the grim ghost of my dead cousin, Tybalt. With trembling hands I raise the phial to my burning lips, my eyes still fixed glassily upon my cousin's shade; and then the deadly potion takes my senses, and I fall prone upon the Venetian rug near the window of my room.

My head hit something hard, and a foolish bump not only brought stars to my vision but also made me see again, with unflattering reality, the tree, the brook, and the sward. Yet now there was another sound mingling distinctly with the gurgling of the little stream, coming from the direction of the opposite bank; the sound of the clapping of hands and a voice crying "Bravo! bravo!"

I sprang to my feet, startled beyond measure, only to realize that my hair had become loosened from its ribbon and had fallen in a mass over my shoulders, that I was glowing and panting as if with physical exercise, that my dress was awry, and that altogether, I must present a most disheveled appearance. I looked, however, in the direction from whence the sound of the voice had come and saw a

man standing not twenty rods from me, smiling and still clapping his hands.

Crimson with chagrin at being caught at my histrionic flights, I stammered:

"You—you—heard?"

"The scene with the friar and the potion scene," he answered easily, and something in his voice sounded familiar. I gazed at him anxiously and thought I recognized his face; only he looked like an every day sort of city man, while the being he had seemed to resemble appeared as if it had stepped from a painting.

"You know the play?" I faltered, still trying to place him in my mind.

"I have the honor to play Mercutio in Miss Brilliant's production of the piece," he replied with a smile.

Of course, so he did. But somehow I wished he had not told me. It seemed to take something away from the glorious dream I had been living for the last few hours; not that he was bad looking, far from it, but he was dressed in a suit of wool, just such a suit as one saw in the clothing stores in the city, a dull brown suit with a stiff white collar and a black ascot tie. Mercutio had been so radiant, so boisterously lovable in velvets and silks of scarlet, green and gold.

"Our train doesn't leave until noon," he went on in a matter-of-fact tone, "and I thought I would take a little stroll across country. I used to be quite an

athlete at college, but traveling about, as we strollers perforce must, one gets but little chance for exercise. Were you ever on the stage?"

I gasped as if some of the cold water of the brook had suddenly been dashed in my face.

"No, Oh, no indeed!" I said, "Why, last night was the first time I ever saw a great actress, or one of Shakespeare's plays."

"Really?" And he elevated his heavy eye-brows. "Then why don't you go on? I should say from what scenes I heard and saw you do, that you had good stuff in you."

"What's that?" I asked innocently.

He laughed, not unpleasantly, and said, "Why talent, the divine afflatus, the capacity to portray emotions and depict characters; in other words, histrionic ability and dramatic temperament."

"Oh, *do* you think so?" I almost breathed, afraid to take my eyes from him lest he vanish into a cloud of smoke like the genii in fairy books who tell you something you can do to find baskets of diamonds and then disappear before you have caught the right word to say or which road you turn down if you decide to take up the search. "Such a thing never entered my head; you know I was only trying just now to see what the sensation must be to play at being someone else—and—well, it was glorious. Do you really think I could?"

"Certain of it," he answered lightly. "Why don't you go to New York and try?"

"I—I wouldn't know what to do," I faltered, not daring to let such a possibility enter my mind.

"Just go to New York," he advised, "and see the managers and tell them you want an engagement. You would have to begin with a small part, perhaps play small parts for some time, but if you improved you would soon be a leading woman and in time, perhaps, a star."

I gasped again and caught at the massive trunk of the tree for support. I felt ready to faint with joy.

"Oh, if I only could!" I murmured. "But it is too wonderful. Such a thing never could be for me."

"Nonsense," said my stranger, "every one has a right to the very best life can give. Try it. I think you'll succeed. At any rate it's a pretty race, and the best horse jumps the highest hurdle, you know. You have as much right to an inning as any one. Try it. Now, is this the way to town, or will I have to vault that high fence?"

I directed him to a path, and tipping his hat, he left me, calling back again over his shoulder:

"Take my advice and try it."

I was sixteen and an orphan, living on the bounty of relatives. In another year or two, it was understood in our household, I would be expected to earn my own living or, at least, something to pay my board and clothe myself until such time as I might marry. This latter state of my existence I put off as vague and distant, and the "earn-my-own-living" part became paramount. This spring morning,

standing beneath the old chestnut tree in our meadow, I seemed to have had the whole problem solved for me. If I earn my livelihood I must, why not do it in the way most acceptable to my tastes and inclinations? Could a more beautiful life be lived than that which surrounded the actor; the æsthetic environment of poetry, music, literature; the daily association with artists, with bright literary minds, meeting, mingling only with that which is refined, gentle, uplifting, and ennobling? For would not Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Shiller, Goethe, Lytton, be one's constant companions, as one lived and impersonated the characters of these great masters?

And then the wonderful opportunity for breadth of education afforded by travel, for players are of the family of strollers! To see one's country from its great cities, its historic points, its huge industries down to its hamlets and farms and fields; to move over its vastness year after year until, at last, one would know by heart almost every hill and dale, river, city, and town of its interesting geography! Yes, here, truly, was an inviting, reasonable profession for a woman, a chance to strive, to work at something beautifully congenial and wonderfully broadening in its aspects.

"Talent," I had come to think, was the one requisite, the one quality which constituted the open sesame to opportunity in the world of art, and this man, himself an artist, associate of a great star, had just now told me I possessed that magic password.

I dared not breathe my aspirations at home; but slowly the leaven worked into my being, and for my future I could see no other life. I bought every magazine I could find which printed a picture of a pretty actress, and eagerly I read the little stories of their successes and achievements, putting each one away in my memory box, and mentally saying:

"So people will read of me some day."

Once I hinted my hopes to Uncle Neil; my aunt, I knew, would have fainted at even a suggestion of the subject. He gently tried to dissuade me, using all the old arguments of tradition as handed about by outsiders. But, although I was silent, I was in no way convinced. It was a possible thing to do, and I would show them all how I could go through. My uncle talked of temptations, but was quite unable to enumerate them, dear soul, from his narrow New England environment, yet he stubbornly "knew that they existed."

The difficulty, to me, was the necessity of some guidance, or advice as to how to make the necessary business arrangements which would procure for me my first engagement, and eagerly I sought in every biography of past or present greatness the record of the first step, or the chance which gave to each her opportunity.

One day, about a year after my encounter with the stranger from the realm of art, I read an article in one of our local newspapers, a notice regarding the visit to our city of a great English actor. He had

with him an American girl as leading woman, and it was the story of her start and rise in the profession which finally brought my resolution to the point where I would arise and achieve though I defied a thousand uncles. Taking the paper in my hand, as though it was to be a guide book on my perilous voyage, I wandered down to the gate in the light of the setting sun, seeming to feel a great uplifting of soul and character, as I realized I should on the morrow make my stand for the right to carve my future for myself. Yet standing there in the western glow, looking out on the peaceful scene of meadow, field and hills stretching away in green rhythmical undulation, growing deep and blue in the distance, I knew, too, that once I had taken the step, I must succeed according to all high ideals of moral character and training, or go down an outcast forever from these good people's lives.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF A CAREER.

At last the sun had broken through the clouds. All the heartache, the weary months of waiting, the haunting fear that after all it might be impossible, had vanished before the dazzling effulgence of the Sun of Promise rising so gaily into the blue sky of Opportunity.

I lived for the first time, that beautiful August day, when I received the long waited for official "call" for rehearsal. There had been no past; no other existence, only this wonderful new gift, the first step towards the coveted goal—an engagement; only a "beginning kind of one"; a wee bit of a part of half a dozen "lines" and "to lead the extras"; the latter commodity, I was told, being such young women as we were to pick up from city to city who would "go on in the village dance."

I was still wildly ambitious to play Juliet, Lady Macbeth, and Rosalind, but I must have a beginning, and I was very young, seventeen, although of the serious type which looks older than its years.

At seventeen life is one dulcet rosy prospect in almost any walk of life, but at seventeen in the realm of art what does the future not hold? Work? yes,

but such work; so inspiring, so broadening; an uplifting kind of work that would become really play in its interesting unfolding! And what it held for one after a few years of endeavor, backed, of course, by talent! "The best horse jumps the highest hurdle," my stranger had told me, and what must not the glory be after striving and struggling with every strength to reach one's goal at last and have one's efforts crowned with the public's approval earned by one's own merit and endeavor!

Looking back now and trying to recall the sensations of that seventeenth year's imagery, that glance into the future, I do not believe that any other vocation holds out such genuine, serious, honest allurements to a woman as does the artistic career. The charm of the work is tremendously appealing, and when one adds to this the independence attendant upon a position quite equal to that of a man's, often surpassing some men's in point of monetary remuneration, well may a woman brave almost any hardship, overcome innumerable obstacles to reach a height so full of compensation for her efforts. Such, at least, was my sensation as, armed with my part of three short speeches, I made my way to the theatre where rehearsals were to be held previous to sending the Company, of which I was to be a member, "on the road." I had already learned, by several severe set backs in attempting to obtain interviews with the better class of managers, that "a road company" engagement was the best I could do as a beginner,

but even this was not really second-class, at that, only the kind which is organized to play, in other cities and towns, a New York city success which is still in its metropolitan "run," or, to speak technically, a No. 2 company.

With my heart beating an almost stifling tat-too against my breast, I passed through the stage entrance (a small doorway on a side street) and gingerly made my way through a long dark passage lined on either side by stacks of scenery piled one wing on top of another and standing upright against the brick walls; trees, cottages, and interiors of houses in bewildering confusion; when suddenly I emerged from this alley of canvas and paint upon a dark, yawning space which I instinctively knew was the stage. How gloomy it looked in the day time, lighted only by one "bunch light" at the stage manager's table in the center and almost over the foot-lights! It seemed, just for a moment, like a great, sinister chasm; formidable, engulfing; but the next instant I became accustomed to the half light, and it changed to a satisfying, almost deliciously creepy, consciousness that it was in reality to be, for the next two weeks, our work shop; and the smell of the paint on the canvas that was every where about us, against the walls and even hanging row on row above our heads, the half chill of the cold dark air, only intensified that indescribable sensation which, I found later, an actor alone can appreciate; half nervous, wholly exciting, invigorating, yet palpitatingly mysterious.

The Company had all assembled, and timorously and shyly I stood back and looked on. They were talking in groups and in pairs, laughing and chatting happily, evidently recounting their holiday experiences.

That was the "leading lady" standing near the stage manager's table. I had seen her pictures so much in magazines and dramatic papers that I knew her and I loved her immediately as something far above me. How pretty she was, although to my theatrically uneducated eye a bit over dressed! A dirty, dusty, almost damp, theatre stage, where even then the charwomen were busy sweeping the dust of the auditorium into the air, so that more than half of it was blown stage-ward, seemed to me hardly the place for a dove colored broadcloth suit, a big hat with a floating white chiffon veil, and (as it was the last of August) white shoes, and a parasol. But I was seventeen and green. I learned before many hours that Miss Melloweye was considered, in the profession, a very "swell dresser."

Every one was acquainted with every one else, and as no one was there whom I knew (the stage manager having been the only person I had met), I stayed in the background until this high official called the name of the part I was to play.

Trembling in every limb, I advanced. He knew I was a novice, and he greeted me most kindly.

"Ah, little Miss Gray," he said in a friendly voice which gave me confidence immediately. "Mr. Little-

man, Miss Gray," introducing me to the comedian with whom I soon learned I had my short "scene."

Then he proceeded to show me the "business" of what little I had to do and was most patient when I did not at once grasp his meaning.

But this first stage manager of mine, on that day of beginning was equally nice to every one, and I thought the rehearsal the most interesting event of my life so far. And how I drank in every explanation given to the others, watched their movements and the development of their characterizations with a fascinated, hungry attention! Had I not entered school, and was not this my apprenticeship?

There was a gentle argument between two actors as to which had the right of way to a certain exit. Only the stage manager could settle the dispute, and when he once gave his opinion on a subject that was the ultimatum, no matter which side seemed to think his reasoning was according to ethics or logic. Again, the "heavy woman" (as I soon learned the female villain was theatrically termed) failed to grasp just the author's meaning, so the stage manager thought, in the reading of a certain line, and he must read it for her. She did not exactly agree to his emphasis, but she gracefully yielded her opinion to his as, of course, he was her director and necessarily must know best. In fact it was delicious, this watching the "wheels go round" which were to develop the play and characters, and give a smooth and finished article to the waiting public.

The "character woman," a well dressed motherly looking person, spoke to me during one of her waits at the first rehearsal, as did also one of the gentlemen, and when we were dismissed I went to my small hotel with a splitting headache from the excitement of so new an experience, but in the seventh heaven of intoxicating bliss.

The second day's rehearsal was a repetition of the first, only that the stage manager had to say "hush—h—h" several times to the groups on the sides who were talking while the scenes were going on in which they were not concerned.

Those who were reading or rehearsing would look over at the buzzing groups and perhaps frown a little, but as soon as they made their exits they joined whichever party was nearest and in a few minutes were being frowned on and "hush—h—h-ed" as hard as their fellows had been by them. Moreover, one of the gentle altercations over the reading of a certain line, in the case of the "leading man," bade fair to end rather stormily, as that gentleman maintained he thought he "knew more about it than even his director did and at all events this wasn't a school of acting and he proposed to play his part as it best suited him." What the stage manager thought of this bit of mutiny I know not, for he did not express himself then, so that any of us heard him; and rehearsal progressed in fine order. In fact a general feeling of good fellowship pervaded the atmosphere and filled me with spasms of delight to see how con-

genial and chummy everything and everyone was going to be. "Truly," thought I, "it is easy to see from whence comes the epithet 'good fellow' when applied to an actor." These people actually bubbled over with kindly feeling towards one another.

The conversations of the various groups embraced an exchange of doings of their fellowplayers, as to whether this one had a successful season or that one a good part, but principally (it struck me after several days) was it gossipy and almost entirely concerned with the comings (often, to me, decidedly short) and goings of the various other members of the same profession, almost always spiced with a criticism by someone of the group as to the why and wherefore of each actor's movements.

Who "so-and-so" was with this season was generally coupled with—"Well I fail to see how he gets such good engagements; he's the rottenest that ever came down the pike." That a "Miss such-an-one" had signed again with such-and-such a firm, this year to be featured in a new play, usually called forth, "Ah, ha! Lady bird is getting solid with the old man" or, "Got hold of a backer at last has she—Well it's about time."

On the other hand, there would be remarks of evident sympathy such as, "What do you think of poor old Goodactor going with that bum stock company again. I can't see why a clever fellow like him doesn't get on better. I saw him do a beautiful bit of work in that production of Blank and Blank's, but he never seems to catch on with the managers."

"He doesn't get into the swim," comments another. "I tell you, you've got to be a 'good fellow' nowadays to work the game. Get in with the push personally. Goodactor is so darned distant and formal."

"Wrapped up in his art, I suppose," a third remarks with a mock sanctimonious air, and at this the group laughs, and Mr. Goodactor is forgotten.

"Living with your husband this season?" banteringly inquired one of the character men of the heavy woman, not a very prepossessing lady to me, by the way, for she had most evidently bleached her hair a bright straw color.

"Not so you can notice it," she answered firmly. Then, with a laugh, she went on, "Separate engagements from this on, and I draw a royalty, too, at that."

"No, really?" the character man ejaculated, "I thought it was only an agreement to disagree."

"Nothing doing," she returned with a positive shake of her head. "I wouldn't have gotten a cent that way. He never did give me anything when I worked. Now the law says pony up, and he'll have to pony."

Then some one of the men hummed gaily, "Oh I'm only a chic divorcee, a dainty and fetching 'vorcee," and once more the group laughed, the "chic divorcee" probably harder than anyone else.

I told myself that it was all good natured banter, but deep in my heart I did not just like the lady with the straw colored hair. However, I decided

not to judge too quickly, that perhaps, like a "singed cat," she might be "much better than she looked."

Miss Gaily, "the soubrette," was a fluffy bit of humanity not more than four feet eleven inches in height and looked like a darling bisque doll. You felt as if you wanted to take her on your lap and play with her as you would with a child, only that there was something in her face that did not seem to fit such an arrangement and was not at all childish. On our fourth day she had a tale to tell which was of general interest, and, although it was interrupted a number of times by the necessity that she rehearse a scene now and then, I think I managed to get the drift of it well enough to be, even in my green and illusioned state, a bit surprised and not a little pained at the bizarre way in which (looking at it as I then did from an ethical standpoint) it was received.

"Did you know that Lovy Littledear has signed a five years' contract with DeVelop Talent?" began Miss Gaily in a whet-your-appetite sort of tone.

"No," from a general chorus, "isn't that great?"

"Well I should say so," and a toss of the head plainly told that she was off on a favorite hobby. "And what is more his brother Smally got it for her."

"Why I thought it was while under Smally's management she had her trouble," ejaculated the juvenile man (so designated because he played the part of a rather young, boyish friend of the hero in the play, but he was really a man with not a small sprinkling of gray hair).

"So it was," went on the fluffy narrator, "but everybody in the whole affair considers her one of the cleverest women in the business. And, oh, she is such a love of a girl, a perfect dear," and the gush and enthusiasm of the tone left no room to doubt the statement.

"Well," Mrs. Im. Biber, the character woman chimed in, "was there really any truth in the story about her and Ezie Lightheart?"

"Was it true?" and Miss Gaily opened her blue eyes very wide. "Why, wasn't I in the company, and didn't I see the whole affair?"

"How was it anyway?" asked Mr. Littleman, the character comedian, a thin, cigarette-smoking little fellow, of an intensely nervous temperament and, I soon became aware, extremely gossipy nature. "I've heard they really left his wife in a western city to starve."

"Oh, that's all rot," indignantly contradicted Miss Gaily. "He sent her to his home, and she's living with his people now. He's an awfully nice fellow, you simply can't help liking him. And hasn't he the swell engagement?—Leading man with Mr. and Mrs. Honeystar. You know, at first, everybody said they would both be up against it, for no reputable manager would give them work because the affair got into the papers so, but, bless you, here they are both going right to the top;" and the look of pride and satisfaction in her eyes could not have been

greater if she had been telling of some good fortune to herself.

A call for her cue kept the story thus far a matter of conjecture only, with me, although the others seemed to have read the papers which had published it. While Miss Gaily was rehearsing her scene, Mrs. Im. Biber, Mr. Littleman, and Mr. Steele Softlee, took up the thread, discussing the talent of the lady with the five years' contract, and it was the general opinion that she was indeed a *very* clever girl. I anxiously waited to hear more of her, experiencing a new sort of blood-tingling sensation as I felt that it was wrong, yet decidedly interesting and exciting, this prying into other people's affairs.

When Miss Gaily returned to our group, we lost Mrs. Biber to the stage, but I was glad the gossipy soubrette went on just the same.

"You know the reason it got into the papers," she gurgled, thoroughly enjoying every minute of her talk. "It was through I. M. Yourfriend, the business manager. He made a play for Lovy the minute she joined the company. In fact there wasn't a boy with us that didn't have a little crush; she's such a darling, but she turned I. M. down good and cold, when the affair began to develop with Ezie, and I. M. naturally got sore. Then Miss Moneygirl, the leading lady, who had a weakness for Ezie which he did not return——"

"Well, hardly," interrupted Littleman, "there's a woman I never could abide. Everybody hates her.

The only reason she ever gets an engagement is that she works for a song and dresses swell."

"Yes," continued Miss Gaily, "and if she isn't the champion for making everybody's business hers. If she didn't butt into the affair and did the grand, virtuous act and kicked and sputtered about its 'being a disgrace for such things to go on in a respectable company' and very kindly, thank you ma'am, put Mrs. Ezie onto the doings in the theatre."

I ventured quite timidly to inquire if Mrs. Ezie was an actress too, and was informed that she was not, but only traveled with her husband.

"She's a mighty pretty woman," commented Mr. Softlee, "I don't think I ever saw more beautiful blue-black hair than she has."

"Oh yes, she's pretty enough," and Miss Gaily's nose took on an angle which plainly said that this lady had none of her good will. "But she makes such a fool of herself over Ezie. She almost blacked his boots for him. Any man gets sick of such devotion as that. And wasn't she the jealous one, well I just guess."

As no one seemed to feel it apropos gently to suggest that, as the story was running, it looked as if she had cause, I refrained and waited for the rest of the narrative.

"So when the crash came," went on Miss Gaily, "and Mrs. Ezie had that stormy scene with them in the dressing room, what did I. M. Yourfriend do but take the bull by the horns then and there,

and get his revenge on Lovy for refusing his proffers of devotion, by sending reporters to Mrs. Ezie while she was in her jealous tantrum, and, of course, she gave the story to them without any frills."

"And then it got out that Ezie left her because she did that." Mr. Softlee helped along.

"Yes," continued Miss Gaily, sailing joyously in at the stretch, "but he didn't. She vows she won't divorce him though. She's a spiteful cat. I suppose her beautiful black hair does that. Of course, Ezie and Lovy have to do the best they can. They are both to be in the same city this winter, even if they are at different theatres."

"What was the stormy scene in the dressing room?" asked the gossip comedian almost hungrily.

We had to wait for that recital until Miss Gaily rehearsed another scene in our play, and in the meantime the two men went over the details, as just recorded, to Mrs. Biber who once more joined us.

"Why," Miss Gaily settled back in her chair again and lowered her voice as a particularly vigorous "hush—h—h" drifted our way just then from the stage manager, "Miss Moneygirl brought Mrs. Ezie to the theatre one night unbeknown to Ezie, and as Lovy's dressing room was right next to Moneygirl's of course, when Ezie made his call in there, just before the half hour was rung, it was quite simple to tell by the silence, when the talking left off and the kissing began. Mrs. Ezie stood it as long as she could and

then made a dash; the door banged in, and—"Gee," from Littleman, "what a scene for a comedy."

"Of course, you can imagine what the black eyes managed to say to them," went on Miss Gaily. "But oh, Ezie and Lovy were simply dear through it all. He told his wife, as quietly as he could, that Lovy was the girl he loved and that he intended to stand by her. Then Lovy told her they had made up their minds to give her so much out of their salaries each season if she would give Ezie up. Wasn't that generous of her? But she is a dear, that girl. Well, anyway, that failed to soften the black eyes, and hence the story to the papers. But maybe I'm not glad Lovy has that contract. It will just show that Moneygirl that she wasn't so many with her influence. I'd like to see DeVelop Talent ever engage *her* for anything, and it will be good to see Lovy crowing over a lot of people who were no better, no, nor half as good as she, who are sticking up their noses because the affair became public."

Now all this struck me as a bit unsavory to talk over, with men especially, but our four days' conversations had verged so much on this line that I was, to a certain extent, used to it, and then, too, I reasoned I was in a totally different world from the one in which I had been reared, and I must realize that people might have opinions and ideas vastly different from mine. After all, this was only a bit of gossip recording an incident that had happened to come under Miss Gaily's observation.

Mr. Softlee and I were left to "group" alone for a few moments, and he said to me in such a very kindly tone:

"Your dear little face is quite like a peony, I'm afraid you did not relish Miss Gaily's recital."

"It was rather new to me," I stammered; "you see I'm very green."

"Oh yes, you mustn't mind her chatter," he conciliated, "she is apt to paint things with rather a broad brush, but she means well. She's awfully loyal to her friends, no matter what they do, and she's a very goodhearted girl."

"She must be," I said; "her sympathies were entirely with the transgressor of this story. It struck me that possibly Mrs. Ezie Lightheart might be entitled to a little consideration too."

"You are not acquainted with the *dramatis personæ* of this playlet," Mr. Softlee went on, speaking kindly, "and moreover you are young and cannot be expected to appreciate the different psychological influences brought to bear, which lead emotional and impressionable souls to become 'transgressors,' as you call them. 'Judge not,' little girl. Wait until you are older and have experiences of your own. 'The grand passion is one terrible thing,' as the Frenchman says. We know not how to sympathize until we have personally felt it."

Something in his voice, his manner, was soothing, comforting, and compelling. I felt quite like a guilty culprit, in his sight, to have even allowed my un-

sophisticated thoughts to show themselves in my blushing face. He must indeed think me a narrow minded little prig, and I realized it was best for me to be careful how I expressed myself from my limited sphere.

Before the fifth day, I received my first shock. We were all very intimate by that time, laughing and talking to such an extent that several of us had to be called when our cues came, and the "hush—h—h" was more irritable and frequent than ever.

Suddenly, out of the hubbub, and like a bolt from a clear sky came thundering from the direction of the stage manager's table:

"—— ——— it! I won't have it. ——! ——! I'm no saint, but by —— I've been patient as long as I can. If this —— ——— talking doesn't stop by —— I'll quit right now."

A crash of the manuscript, as he banged it on the table! A deadly and awful stillness—the hush in the breath of a storm. What would happen next, I wondered. No one spoke. No one moved. I shot a frightened glance towards the various groups of offenders, expecting to see some stalwart fellow step forward and knock this blasphemer down. But the men stood, or sat, in mute, calm attitudes, all facing the one who was sending forth these terrible oaths. The women were also looking at him, apparently unabashed. I felt the blood surge to my face, and I wished that the earth might swallow me if he should break out again. He thrust his hands

in his pockets and began to pace up and down in front of his table, his head hanging a little. Was he ashamed? I asked myself. The next instant I had my answer, for, after two or three revolutions before us, he banged his fist on the table and did break out again, this time seemingly lashing himself into a fury:

"Good — —! a man would have to be a little tin — — to stand it. You are not content with giving me a rotten rehearsal, defying me to my very teeth if I try to give you some idea as to acting, when you are like a lot of children and don't know the common rules of characterization, but you must get off in corners and buzz-buzz," this latter in the tone a child uses when it makes a face at you and says "nayah nayah—," "and then," he went on, "a — of a lot of work I get out of you, — — it," the flame of temper growing worse as each word fanned it, with more force than ever, "I'm as easy as any one, but by — there's a limit, by — —."

Would no one stop him? I was ready to scream. My face was burning with shame for him, but every one else seemed utterly unaffected by anything he was saying. Another minute of it, and then with the impulse of the panic stricken who cry "let me out of this—anywhere!" I started for the door.

"Where in — are you going?" he roared. "Come back here, it's up to your scene any way. Come, Billie, begin at your entrance again and let's

see if we can have a grain of intelligence, or a ha' path worth of decency exhibited."

"Billie" began his speech exactly where he had left off; not a tremor in his voice, as cool and good natured as if there had been no interruption.

I sputtered and stammered my few lines, but his mightiness, Mr. Temper, was still striding up and down in front of the table, only now he contented himself with muttering his oaths in an undertone and in all probability heard never a word of our scene.

The groups gradually reassembled, but whispering very low, and farther in the dark corners. When I made my exit, I slipped over to where Mrs. Biber was talking with several of the boys (they are all boys, I found, from "the old man" down to the property boy), and sinking into a chair near her, I managed to gasp:

"Oh! Wasn't it awful?"

They all looked at me at first astonished, then they laughed.

"Good gracious," said Mrs. Biber, "that wasn't anything. Temper is easy. Did you ever rehearse for Will Thunder?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he is the limit," she went on. "He calls you every name on the calendar till he simply gets you into hysterics, and then spends an hour damning you for having them."

"But to swear before ladies," I ventured. This met with a round of winks.

"You are young, me child," said one of the boys in a burlesque, fatherly fashion. "You have much to learn."

With rising anger, I blurted out, "I should have thought some of you men would have stopped him."

Oh most unfortunate exclamation! I realized that night, when I laid my weary head on my pillow and gently cried myself to sleep, that we had been together five days, chummy good fellows, but I was to be forever, from this time on, an unpopular girl among my associates because of that fatal remark. For on going home after rehearsal, the doors of the corner café swung open as I passed, and ranged along the front of the bar in the deepest of conviviality, were "the boys" and this ogre of a stage manager who but a few minutes before, had been consigning us all to the lower regions. He had certainly lost none of their respect by this exhibition of temper nor were they any the less his friends for causing such an outbreak. "But," I thought, in my green-horn way, "if he drinks with them, how can he expect them to be subservient?" I could hardly see a general standing on such a footing with his men and expecting to keep discipline.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROAD.

We opened, or had our first performance, in Troy, N. Y., a one-night stand, I was informed, to try the company and get the rough edges off the play and acting. The manager was with us to see how we compared with the original, or metropolitan, organization, which made our task, I think, even doubly hard as comparisons are always more or less odious.

Yet the nervousness and excitement of that "first night" were simply exhilarating. The effect was only analogous to the first plunge of the season into the sea, or a child's feeling of being in peril yet with a strong hand leading it, an unexplainable fear and tremulous emotion, but with it all, still, a sense of security and hope.

It seemed to me that Miss Melloweye ought to have been the happiest woman in the world to have so charming a role; to be able to look so pretty; and to be so applauded and rewarded for her performance with bouquets of roses until her dressing-room became a veritable bower of posies. Everything was hubbub and excitement, but to me the actors played as if inspired.

Success seemed in the very air, as call after call was the compensation for the endeavor of each act. Mr. Nevermind, the leading man, apparently outdid himself. Mr. Littleman was a success from start to finish. I plunged in and said my three speeches with what was, to me, gusto enough to take the roof off the house. How I made my extra girls come up in the "shouts," and how we did romp that village dance! Work? Why, we were actually aglow with the physical exertion we were going through, and we really labored as if we each individually owned that "show" and it was our money which was to be lost if it didn't "make good." You see I was already becoming accustomed to the vernacular, so that it was easy to express myself as the older professionals did.

Never have I seen a more finished, more artistic bit of work than that done by Mrs. Biber, a truly splendid artist who had received her training in Europe. Mr. Softlee, also, showed what association with the best artists will do towards the development of talent, as I soon learned he numbered among his very youthful engagements many with the so-called "good old timers," now gone to a happier "play house," let us hope. It was to me a supreme pleasure to watch such artists from the wings, and I frankly confess I missed not one of their scenes (although I noticed that I was the only one who took such an interest in the work of the other members of the company), and it was almost an æsthetic joy that rebounded over my excited nerves as I listened to

the laughter and applause which was wafted to us from the great auditorium in apparently sympathetic response to the machinery of which we were turning the wheels. "To make that great throng laugh, weep, feel, live with one," the sensation was little less than sublime.

The first night was a festival truly, and when the manager called us together at the end of the play, panting, muscle weary, yet jubilant, and proud, we assembled on the stage.

He waited even after we were all in a more or less straight line and looked us all over in a most embarrassing pause; evidently to make sure we were each and every one attentive; then his piping twang and irritating voice came shrilly through his nose:

"Ladies and gentlemen! that was positively the ———, rottenest performance I ever had the misfortune to see of this piece. If I couldn't run a theatre any better than you can act, I'd shoot myself for taking money under false pretenses. You all saw the original company. Why don't you try to imitate if you haven't any ability of your own?" Warming up, he addressed himself to the leading lady. "Stella Melloweye," he whined, "I engaged you for this part because I supposed you to be a good dresser. Where in the name of the good Lord did you get those rags you had on to-night? (Her dresses had cost over one thousand dollars, but that was a detail.) "On Grand Street I'll bet. —,

but they were rotten! See if you can't get somebody in Chicago to fix 'em up a bit."

The leading man next was the "rottenest he had ever seen at the price." "Call yourself a high salaried man indeed!" The comedian likewise received comment, and all down the line, even to me who "really, for a beginner, showed about as much promise as a small black kitten." We were all collectively and individually, "Rotten! ROTTEN! ROTTEN!" until I found myself vaguely spelling the odious thing, and if by any chance, he had hesitated, I felt that to prompt him with that one word would have started him right in almost any sentence he might have been forming.

Mr. Temper (who by the way stood meekly near his employer, never daring to utter a word) was directed to rehearse us every day of our Chicago engagement, which was to be our first week stand; "that is, if the city allowed us to play out the time allotted to us," a most sarcastic suggestion; and we were dismissed. Wilted and crestfallen, we shrank away to our respective dressing rooms ashamed to look one another in the face, and when we had removed the paint and trappings which had done their share to make us so "ROTTEN," as in Miss Melloweye's case, we wandered listlessly, weary in body and spirit, to the uninviting hotel which the road actor needs must call "home."

I had cherished a secret hope, while we were rehearsing in New York, that once we were traveling

Mrs. Biber would be good enough to take me under her matronly wing, but to-night she left the theatre before I had finished dressing, and I walked a block behind her to the hotel quite by myself. No one had offered to go with me, nor had taken the pains to see if I was provided with an escort, the men having all taken themselves to the nearest saloon with the exception of Mr. Nevermind, who saw Miss Melloweye to her door.

As I called for my key at the hotel office, Miss Gaily, who, by the way, had been most charming in her performance that night, was standing at the desk, also waiting for her key.

"You look dead tired," she said to me, "come to my room and have a glass of beer." She moved toward the elevator, while the clerk gave me my key. I did not like to refuse her before him, and I felt that to say I didn't like beer would sound very foolish, so I meekly followed.

I had not entered this profession with any idea of elevating it, for I did not deem such a performance at all necessary. It was an art, and as such I accepted it with all its contingencies. But having heard the weird stories of drunkenness and debauchery which (in the minds of my narrow New England advisers against this step of mine) ran riot among the people with whom I would have to associate, I had determined by my example, at least, to show that it was possible to "be in the world and yet not of it"; to prove that these stories were gross libels on a kind

and generous, if unconventional, people and that, therefore, I would personally eschew beer and alcoholic drinks as not essential to my welfare nor necessary to my happiness.

The elevator slowly swung itself to the top floor, generally termed "actor's row," and I went with my hostess to her room; not that it differed in any degree from my own. It was, in fact, quite as cheerless and uncomfortable. A bed, bureau, wash stand and wardrobe, all in cheap pine, one small table, and two cane seated upright chairs comprised the furnishings.

Miss Gaily threw herself on the bed with a groan and exclaimed:

"Gee! but I'm glad the first night's over."

I seated myself in one of the uninviting upright chairs and heaved a sigh. How much rather I would have gone to my own room and to bed, as we had to leave early in the morning for the next town, but the soubrette had explained in the elevator that she always had something to eat and drink after "the show" and it would do me good too!

She ignored my sigh and went on:

"Didn't the show go great? We'll make a big hit in Chicago."

"Why," I exclaimed in astonishment, "Mr. Fudge said it was—was—" really I could not say the word. He had used it so often, over and over again, in his speech that it had lost any meaning it ever might have been coined for, and now appealed to me only as vulgar and empty.

"Oh, pooh!" answered Miss Gaily, "Who cares what he said? He had that speech all fixed before he ever left New York. What does he know about acting? Why, it isn't more than seven years ago that he used to sell peanuts in the gallery of one of the theatres he now owns. He has a wild idea that to talk like that keeps salaries down. Managers get the bee in their bonnets that if they praise an actor he'll think he's worth three times as much as he's getting. Wait until you've been in the business as long as I have, and things like that won't cut any ice with you at all."

"I know I have a great deal to learn," I murmured, and at that moment a waiter brought in a tray on which were some sandwiches and a couple of bottles of beer, not uninviting looking, and cold.

Miss Gaily rose from the bed, tipped the waiter, and taking the other high chair, began to do the honors. I felt mean and small to tell her I did not drink, after her kindness in inviting me. And it was kind, for I was sure now, had I gone to my dismal room alone, I should have cried myself to sleep; so I pocketed my scruples and drank my first glass of what she called "the foamy."

And this I have found is nearly always the way a first time (of anything we have previously told ourselves we will never do) comes about. The road is paved so gradually, the circumstances come around so naturally, the situation in itself appears to have no immediate element of wrong doing, and there is

always such a seemingly good excuse, that the depravation, or sin if you wish, is committed with scarcely a ripple on the waters of conscience. Even in the secret of my own closet, when "I laid me down to sleep," there came no qualms from a brain half stupefied with desire for sleep, and the brew.

"You know the reason Fudge gave it to Melloweye about her dresses, don't you?" Miss Gaily was saying, as I put down my glass, wondering vaguely if I should ever grow to like the bitter taste, though it had certainly quenched a very thirsty throat. I shook my head, and she went on:

"Well, in order to get Fudge to engage Nevermind this season, she gave up fifteen dollars a week on her salary, so that the management would put it on his, and, of course, Fudge wanted to give her a dig about skimping on her gowns."

I opened my eyes and sat up quickly. To my seventeen-year-old ears those words breathed a romance deep and sweet. Of course Mr. Nevermind and Miss Melloweye loved each other. I might have known it from their very attentive attitude towards each other. Even in New York he had always gone from rehearsals with her, and to-night he had brought her to the hotel when all the other men had gone off together. Then suddenly I remembered the history of Ezie and Lovy, as recited by my entertaining friend and I asked rather gingerly:

"Is either of them married?"

"Good gracious, no." Miss Gaily seemed really hurt at the question. "Why should you ask such a thing?"

"Isn't that dear!" I exclaimed, more relieved than I dared show. "They are in love with each other, then."

"Oh, awfully," laughed Miss Gaily, "ever since last season's 'Road to Ruin Company.' It was so bad they simply wouldn't be separated this season, but Fudge doesn't pay a leading man Nevermind's salary, as a rule; so Stella had to help him out."

"That is very deep devotion indeed," I said, "but I wonder Mr. Nevermind would consent to such an arrangement, for, after all, it is just the same as if she gave him that amount of money, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," returned this gossip, calmly munching a cheese sandwich, "but Robert is a stickler on his salary, and he can get it, too, from other managers, and Stella wants him with her; so she must pay for it."

That did not sound exactly gallant on Mr. Nevermind's part, but I reasoned that they must have some personal motive which a member of the company like Miss Gaily would not know.

"Then," I ventured, brightening again after this reassuring thought, "we will probably have a wedding in the company before the season is over."

Miss Gaily looked at me a moment with her head on one side like a quizzical little bird; then she laughed a trifle nervously, I thought, and said lightly:

"Have some pickles, Miss Foolish." I took one, but I can't say I relished the cognomen she bestowed upon me and was about to ask her what she meant when she went on abruptly, asking:

"You are really seventeen, and this is your first season?"

"Yes," I answered bravely, "I'm a beginner."

"So I see," she returned with a decisive nod of the head; then added in a most matter-of-fact tone, "Do you think you will like it?"

"Oh, it isn't a matter of liking," I cried, "art is so beautiful; how can one help but adore it?"

She looked at me seriously, and her eyes became almost two slits in her face as she said, with a hard, flinty ring in her voice, "Yes, you are right. It is a beautiful *art*, but it's the — *business* any one ever got up against."

I gasped, as if she had thrown a glass of cold water in my face, but before I could ejaculate my astonishment, not only at the idea expressed, but at the "cuss" word which accompanied it, she was calling "Come in," in answer to a knock on the door, and Mr. Young-lush—"Billie," as he was universally called—walked in.

I had rather taken a dislike to this individual at rehearsals. He had an aggressive way of coming up to the various groups at most inopportune moments and making remarks on current conversations that were, to my inexperienced ear, anything but delicate. Still he seemed very popular with every member of

the company, possibly because of his connection with the management. He could not have been more than twenty-two or twenty-three years old, yet, even to my narrow vision, he appeared dissipated and "sporty." He might have been called good looking, but for two ugly puffs under his almost blood shot, piercing black eyes, and but for his sensual, swollen lips.

"Hello, girls!" he now greeted us cheerily, seating himself easily on the bed, "how goes it?"

"Oh, we're just having a bite," answered Miss Gaily, her bright manner reappearing. "It's a wonder you wouldn't have walked to the hotel with a fellow. Here's a seventeen-year-old who had no one to escort her through the dark streets of Troy."

Billie gave me a leery sort of grin and observed:

"Nothing doing in the satchel carrying line this season, Gaily. I'm going to be such a good boy my own mother won't know me next summer."

Miss Gaily laughed heartily at this.

"Don't believe him," she cried, "he always starts out every season with those resolutions and becomes the champion pairer off of every company before three weeks are over his head. Look out for him.

"Pairer off!" It was a new phrase to me, and the words stuck in my throat when I wished to ask what they meant, and Miss Gaily went on:

"Besides, Billie has lots of influence with the management. He can get a part for you to under-study. It's worth while being nice to him."

"Yes," broke in Billie, giving me an insinuating glance from his black eyes, "you make up to me, and you'll get good parts." Miss Gaily went off into a paroxysm of laughter, long and loud.

"There, now, you see," she exclaimed in her mirth, "there are his satchel carrying resolutions gone to the dogs already."

The beer had made me quite sleepy and perhaps a little cross, for I really could find no occasion for so much noise at one o'clock in the morning in a public hotel. I pushed back my chair and said I thought I should go to bed, since we had such an early start in the morning, and I stood in the doorway a moment, expecting Billie would leave the room when I did, but they both bade me a genial "good night," and he seated himself in the chair I had just vacated, pulled out a cigarette, and lighted it. As I closed the door, he had tilted the uncomfortable chair against the wall on its hind legs and settled himself, evidently for a good long chat.

I did not go over the foregoing conversation to myself before I went to sleep. The work of the performance had tired me, and the beer had quite dulled my sensibilities, so that my one thought was to go to sleep. With insufficient rest and a "dark brown" taste in my mouth, next day, on the train, I had time and inclination to do a little thinking.

The words of that boy Billie, "be nice to me and you'll get good parts," came to my mind with relentless

frequency, and the emotion they inspired was purely that of revulsion.

"Be nice to him?" Good gracious! his was a most repulsive personality; the kind of nature I had always been taught to avoid. His swollen, bloated look, especially about the mouth and nostrils, his breath, which was never free from the odor of stale alcohol, was most offensive to me. I had noticed at rehearsals that he did not even practice the common courtesies of life. He never arose from his chair, no matter how many ladies were standing in his presence, and having a chronic case of catarrh, his utter disregard of the law, as laid down by the board of health in street cars, was something almost too much for any one to stand.

"Be nice to him," good heaven! the very suggestion fanned what had been an indifferent contempt into a rebellious dislike.

With blood boiling, I said over and over to myself, "If being nice to a creature like that means getting a good part, then I never want to play one."

But, of course, it did not, I soon was able to tell myself soothingly. That was all talk. Miss Melloweye had the best part in the piece and she hardly noticed Billie's existence. Then my mind took on a much pleasanter frame as I began to peep into the Nevermind-Melloweye romance.

Sleepy as I was, in the gray of our early morning "jump," I had noticed that they came to the depot in the same carriage and were now (happy mortals of large salaries) seated in the Pullman car; where they

had purchased seats, an extra not furnished by the management. They were quite exclusive, and I took it for granted such was the professional etiquette of the leading people.

Miss Melloweye was even more distant than Mr. Nevermind, for he did mix with the "boys" now and then while she only gave us all a sweet and graceful, but decidedly formal, "good morning" and "good evening."

Miss Gaily kept half of her seat in the coach for Billie when he was not in the smoking car, and, as Mrs. Biber had completely frozen me in the dull dawn of train time, I was quite by myself on this first journey, except for a little time when, much to my disgust, Billie threw himself into the seat beside me.

I tried to be civil, though I am sure it was a poor attempt, and I was not so unsophisticated that I did not soon discover that he was "guying" me.

"How's the atmosphere up there any way?" he asked by way of greeting.

"I do not know what place you are talking about," I answered. Perhaps I did speak coldly. At any rate he pretended to shiver and blew on his fingers as if they were freezing.

"Gee, but the icicles are hanging long and pointed," he chattered; "why don't you shovel the snow of Purity Street and give the wagons a chance?"

I felt it quite out of my power to answer him, for I only half grasped his meaning. Then he went on in the tone of the typical Bowery tough: "Aw come off

de ice wagon, cull: dat bluff's no good. Say," he continued, turning to me squarely and with an ill-disguised sneer, "how does it feel to be so darned good any way?" Then, before I could protest, he went on in a burlesque of a whiskey-soaked old hag with hiccoughs and a glassy stare, "Sir, I'll let you know I'm a perfect lady."

I could almost have laughed at his clever imitation, but the thought back of it made me wince.

I muttered something about "not being aware I thought myself any better than any one else," but he broke out with:

"Wake up little maiden; no posing 'round with us, you know. We're all good fellows, and the Virgin-Mary attitude don't go. See?"

He gave me a familiar pat on the back and left me.

"Be nice to that!"

I could have screamed with vexation. Why should he have made such a remark to me as this last one. I had taken no other attitude than that to which I had been reared—common decency—why assert that I was posing as good? I had made no remark which could lead any one to suppose I thought I was different from the other members of the Company; with the exception perhaps that I seemed to be the only one who objected to swearing.

Perhaps that was prudish. I had heard so much of it by this time, not from the men only, but, as far as the small "cuss words" were concerned, from the

women, too, I was beginning to be quite used to it and to see very plainly that my objection had distinctly arisen from newness.

The other men of the Company had taken scarcely any notice of my existence since we left New York except, perhaps, Mr. Softlee, the juvenile, a man possibly between forty and forty-five years of age, whose manner of saying "good morning" and "how is the little girl to-day" had almost the soothing effect that one's father's might have had.

True to Miss Gaily's prophecy we scored a hit in Chicago, notwithstanding that rehearsals were called each day. Mr. Temper, the stage manager, who had been most kind to me in New York, now became almost brutal. The merest slip on my part served for vituperation and abuse, until several times I was on the verge of hysteria. No one seemed to care, and I suppose they all felt that they had troubles of their own and mine were none of their business. Still I was a novice; a beginner, and surely if I did things as atrociously as he said, why should he not explain and direct me to a better understanding rather than insult me because I did not know.

It soon began to puzzle me. Not a performance passed, but I was reprimanded for something until I was afraid to go on the stage for my poor little scene dreading that the very audience would rise up and hoot me off. I felt, surely, there must be something back of it all, some personality for which I was innocently suffering.

"Ven ve air tronc, cumps oud de troot," the German in our play said every night, and I soon found it to be literally a fact. While we were going from one town to another, our worthy stage manager made the train by the veriest sixteenth part of a second and in a condition decidedly the worse for wear. He had been out with friends since the close of the performance the night before, and they had treated him royally. He now spent this entire journey, talking incessantly to different members of the Company, moving from one seat to another; telling them of his glorious "good time." Each listened, laughed, and "old boyed" him until I could not help thinking once more that if lack of dignity meant anything to discipline, he must never again expect to be obeyed. But all the others laughed and jibed with him, seeming greatly to enjoy his drunken companionship. Finally, he lolled over Mrs. Biber, who occupied a seat in front of me, and began to slobber and sputter a most indelicate story. Undoubtedly, my unschooled face showed its displeasure, for he kept looking at me out of the corners of his bleary eyes and at last fired the offensive point of his miserable jest directly at my helpless ear.

Mrs. Biber exploded with laughter, and I turned my burning face toward the car window. But I was not to escape. Leaning over the back of her seat, he put his face close to mine, his hot fermenting breath pervading my nostrils in sickening puffs:

"I beg your pardon," he drolled, in sarcastic apology. "I beg your pardon. I forgot we had a social purity company this year. The New England Virgin not only objects to swearing, but she actually has no idea of humor, not the slightest appreciation of wit. I beg your pardon, little Joseph, Mary and John and all the members of the Holy Family. Miss Gray, the immaculate! But I'd hate to trust myself behind the door with the lady when no one was looking," and he ended with a sickening chuckle and a suggestive thump in Mrs. Biber's ribs, at which she laughed so heartily I fled, reduced to tears, to another part of the car.

That was the secret then. Some one had told him I had objected to his swearing, and it had called down upon my head all his wrath and spleen. I was the culprit for objecting, not he in any sense for having committed the offense, and I must suffer the penalty.

Hasn't some one pertinently said "We can forgive one who injures us, but never those whom we injure?" I realized in that moment that my stage manager was my enemy for life.

And what of the one who had told him? How unkind; how unfriendly of him! If I had made a mistake in remarking it, why carry it to him and cause him to dislike me?

I was asking myself this, between my sobs, when Mr. Softlee came and sat by me and, placing his hand on mine, said caressingly:

"Don't, don't cry like that, it isn't worth it." It was the first word of sympathy I had heard since I left those at home who had been friends, and it seemed like the "balm of Gilead" to my troubled heart.

I stammered my question, regarding the telltale, to him and he answered:

"Well, the majority of actors would have told him, thinking to ingratiate themselves in his esteem."

"But how could injuring another enhance them in value to him?" I asked.

"In no way, only that some people like to gossip, and Temper is a regular old woman that way. So is Littleman and a dozen others I might mention. But you mustn't mind these things. They always come up in a season. You are too sensitive, and, incidentally, while we are on the subject, let me give you a little advice; you must try and not be quite so imperious in your manner. People are apt to interpret it that you are going around a constant reproach on their shortcomings; disapproving of their peccadillos as it were; and it hurts their pride. No one likes to be lectured, even by a manner. We meet all sorts and conditions of people in this profession, and we must learn, first of all, to be tactful."

I judged by this remark that I must have been the subject of much discussion amongst my associates and that the result was a general consensus of opinion that I carried myself as though I thought I was superior to them all. Perhaps my demeanor was rather serious, as I had been taught at home that one

should deport herself with reserve while traveling in public. And now I found this early training had gained for me the reputation of being imperious and also the appellation of "New England Virgin," this latter appearing to me so insulting that I was ready then and there, to pack my trunk and go home if any one ever dared say it to me again. Mr. Softlee sat in my section until we reached our "next stand" and succeeded in talking me into a good humor.

He really was a very interesting man. I found he had been in the profession since his early boyhood and had played with great actors whose very names were dreams of grandeur to me. At that time I did not notice that his store of knowledge was entirely bounded, hilled, daled, laked, and streamed by the theatrical profession, that vocation being so new and interesting to me, from its artistic side, that I drank in every word with intoxicating delight.

He had such lovely stories about that beautiful soul Edwin Booth. When he was with McCullough this thing happened; with the elder Southern something else. Dear old Billie Florence was one of the most versatile of actors. What a great actress Mrs. D. P. Bowers was! What a great man such an one was. Such another was, in his estimation, the greatest tragedian then living. Art! Art! Art! characterization and generalization until, in spite of the direful beginning of Mr. Temper's insult, that afternoon from St. Louis to Evansville was the most interesting, delightful, and happy of any I had as yet spent "on the road."

CHAPTER III.

TWO FRIENDS AND SOME INCIDENTS.

From that day I seemed to have found a friend, the first who really took a kindly interest in me and who assumed to care whether I was unhappy or not. Mr. Steele Softlee became a good chum, a companion, and, in a sense, a protector. When the distance from the depot to the hotel was great, he would walk it with me and save me the trouble (and what was to me, then, embarrassment) of going to the hotel office to register my name and be assigned a room. Mr. Softlee would now send me to the parlor, and soon a bell boy would come and take me to the room allotted to me.

Mr. Nevermind did this courtesy for Miss Melloweye, and thus we were thrown together more than the other ladies who attended to the selecting of their rooms for themselves. Although Billie was chummy enough with Miss Gaily, and Mr. Temper and the lady with the straw colored hair were hand and glove, as they said, they never allowed these ladies to interfere with their personal convenience.

I found Miss Stella Melloweye a very sweet mannered girl and quite disposed to like me, which was more than I could say of the others. After a

time she asked me to her room, and when I screwed my courage to the point of going (she was the "leading lady" and a great personage in my eyes) she talked so sweetly of her mother, to whom she seemed to be most devoted and who lived in New York, that I instantly loved her for her evident filial and beautiful nature.

"Mamma is such a dear, religious soul," she told me. "I had a letter from her the other day in which she said she had asked the prayers of her Church for her little daughter, who was away on the road and subjected to so many temptations. By the way," she asked, "do you belong to the Association for the Union of Church and Stage?"

"No," I replied, "I never heard of it before." She laughed and said:

"That doesn't matter. It is an organization for the bringing together of church and stage. All churches and all actors are admitted who care to join. I am one of the charter members."

I was delighted to hear this, for I had always been told that actors were, as a class, most irreligious.

"Do many actors and actresses belong to it?" I asked.

"Oh, a great many," she answered. "You really must join. I'll propose your name for you."

"Thank you," I said, "what are the duties, or rather what is the idea?"

"Well," she explained, "the ministers in various towns, who belong, welcome the visiting actors who

attend their churches, and in some cities they have reading rooms for members of companies to go to and meet people of the churches and read and—and—”

I do not know why she paused, possibly because there were no more duties to explain; but I was going over in my mind the places we had visited, and I could not remember of having heard of any of our company going to such reading rooms, and as to attending church, nearly all our traveling was done on Sunday, and I had not been inside my own church more than once since we left New York. I did not, however, express these thoughts to Miss Melloweye for she was quite enthusiastic on the subject, and I felt that if I joined the society I would soon learn its real virtue.

I was more than delighted to find Miss Melloweye so serious minded a girl, especially as I had been quite disappointed in Miss Gaily, who was now almost frigid to me, and Mrs. Biber, who positively snubbed me. Girl-like, however, I should have liked to have her confidence about her engagement, but she never mentioned Mr. Nevermind's name to me, and if he came in when I was chatting with her, I always felt an unuttered invitation to shorten my call, and as I would hurriedly make my adieu without being pressed to stay, I realized I was quite right in obeying the subtle suggestion.

My heart was heavy to discover, after we had been out several weeks, that these two objects of my romantic dreams had violent quarrels. One evening

Miss Melloweye was taken from the stage in hysterics, and the entire company patted her hands and iced her head for nearly an hour before she could be quieted.

I was in agony. She was my ideal, so sweet, so lovable. I was sure it must have been his fault. How did he dare to be cruel to her? I tried to get at the cause of this outbreak from Miss Gaily, but she only sneered at me and told me I was wasting my pity.

"That's a trick she has when she thinks he is getting tired of her," she said. Then she added sarcastically, "Children shouldn't get mixed up in these things, anyway."

Mr. Steele Softlee walked to the hotel with me after we put Miss Melloweye in a cab, and he saw my undisguised distress; never had I heard a human being cry as this girl had cried. But Mr. Softlee explained that the artistic temperament did every thing with an excess of emotion and that, though the show was great, the real grief was no more than that which many a woman would suffer in silence.

"But what had he done?" I asked, sorely puzzled.

"I don't know," he returned. "Robert is a queer fellow, and Stella is so terribly in love with him that she thinks if she doesn't have every moment of his time he is tiring of her; and, of course, he likes to get out with the boys and whoop things up now and then and——"

I had solved it. Once in New York some one had said something about the possibility of Nevermind's staying sober all season, but I had paid little attention to it. Now I saw that he had a weakness for drink, and Stella was trying to save him from it. He had evidently been "straight" so far, but that day he had been out with some friends to a club, and I noticed his eyes were glassy and his voice thick during the performance.

My heart went out to our "leading lady" more than ever. She was a good, noble girl; and she must win eventually, especially if he loved her, which I felt sure he did.

I was deep in this thought when Mr. Softlee gave me the key to my room, having procured it for me from the office while I waited at the elevator, and I was aroused from my reverie with a start when I heard him ask:

"Do you mind if I take my bit of beer and lunch with you to-night? I don't feel exactly like mixing with the boys."

I felt the blood simply consume my face, and still it was something I had expected. He had been kind, attentive, and friendly to me, and the rooms of the other ladies in the company were their homes which anyone was privileged to enter at almost any time. Yet I had a hope, deep in my heart and unexpressed even to myself, that this man would show me the unconscious respect not to take such a liberty even if it was considered *comme il faut* with our associates.

Nevertheless he had asked the right now, and he had been so kind to me, so sympathetic when I was in trouble, and, what was more, his interest in me had become a protection against the undisguised contempt bestowed upon me by the other members of the company. Since he had been looking after me a bit, Mr. Temper's cruelty had ceased, and he now treated me almost with deference. I supposed, naturally, that Mr. Softlee had seen fit to defend my "newness," and he had agreed not to be too hard on a greenhorn who meant better than she knew how to behave. Even Billie did not "guy" me any more, but confided his attentions to Miss Gaily.

So once again I found my excuse for "the first time." I had long ago declared to myself, in high principled firmness, that even if it was thought nothing of amongst my associates, none of the gentlemen should ever come to my room while I was living thus in hotels. Here was my temptation, and with it, simultaneously and conclusively, my excuse. Mr. Softlee had always treated me as a gentleman should, and he surely would not have asked this if he felt I could be in any way compromised or placed in a false position; for surely, what my sisters saw no harm in doing themselves, they could not blame in me.

Never did I spend a more miserable hour. I liked Mr. Softlee, and to my artistically thinking soul his conversation was most enjoyable, for he always talked art or told professional anecdotes; yet try as I would to be interested now I could not smother that

inward feeling of impropriety. Whether he felt it or not I cannot say. He was as easy and gracious and kindly as on all other occasions. He said he considered it very womanly and sweet of me to be so sympathetic towards Miss Melloweye and quite agreed with me that it was most noble in her to attempt to reform Nevermind.

"And she will succeed," he affirmed. "A woman's love can do wonders. In fact there is nothing so elevating, so ennobling and inspiring to a man as the love of a good woman."

Of course, I glowed with satisfaction at that statement and was doubly glad to hear a man I really admired voice it. Mr. Softlee had true, lofty instincts. I was fortunate indeed to have such a man take an interest in me. As long as I was deprived of the companionship of a woman, that of a good man could not be harmful.

Nevertheless I was glad when he had gone. I liked to talk to him, but I preferred to confine our friendly conversations to the cars, to behind the scenes in the theatre, or to walking to and from depots and hotels.

When I went to breakfast next morning Miss Melloweye was already down and she beckoned me to sit at her table. She was smiling as sweetly as if she had never known anything but happiness all her life, and I was miserable and weak when I asked her how she felt.

"Oh, fine!" she said with a laugh, for she seldom used slang. "And you?" It was merely such an

answer as she might have given me any morning, and since it absolutely disarmed sympathy, I could not question further.

I ordered my breakfast, but without appetite. I was puzzled indeed. Did these people hide their hearts, their more serious natures under a laughing exterior until at last the pent emotions broke all bounds and burst forth in a torrent of agony such as this girl had exhibited the night before? Or were they really devoid of feeling, only theatrically convulsive on such occasions as when something crossed their idea of happiness? Miss Melloweye saw that I was worried, and just a shadow of a frown came over her face as Mr. Nevermind entered the dining room and took the vacant chair at the table with us. He showed plainly the early morning effects of a night's drinking, and his voice was quite husky as he said "Good morning" to me.

As he did not even look at the woman who I believed loved him more dearly than her own life, I could only murmur a cold "Good morning," feeling terribly *de trop*. In spite of her merry face, then, they had not made up.

There was an awkward pause, and from the silence Miss Melloweye said cooingly:

"You didn't say good morning to me, Robert, because you saw me in the elevator."

One of the boys sitting at the next table choked on some coffee and had a very bad sputtering time, and I am not sure but that I saw Stella nod her head

toward me and give Nevermind a sort of warning look. However, he glanced at the choking man and then at me and with a growl muttered:

"Oh ——!" and proceeded to order his breakfast.

I fled, leaving my food untouched, and putting on my hat went for a long walk, seeing nothing, only thinking, thinking.

What kind of men were these? What kind of women? How could a man dare use such language to a woman he loved, who was to be his wife and she permit it? Surely the intimate association to which we were all subjected did not give us such license as that. Miss Melloweye was a sweet mannered, gentle little woman of most evident refinement, and I made up my mind to ask her if it was necessary to become so calloused simply because we were on equal livelihood earning terms with these men.

I went to her room, when I returned to the hotel, and she gently bade me enter.

"What ever is the matter with you?" she cried as I opened the door, "you look as if you were on the verge of a nervous headache."

"I—I—can't get over the way Mr. Nevermind spoke to you at the table," I stammered, afraid to trust myself to wait to lead up to the subject, "and after your hysteria of last night too."

She laughed a little nervously, I thought, and went to the window; so I did not see her face.

"He was only joking," she said. "You take these things too seriously, my dear "

"But," I persisted, "I don't see how he dares when you are so good to him." I was thinking then of the fifteen dollars he took each week from her salary.

"Well, you know," she said soberly, "Robert has an awful weakness, and when he breaks out we never know how it is going to end. He had been drinking all day yesterday, and I took him to task for it last night, and he didn't like it, and we had a scene. It was really my fault. I should have waited until he was sober."

"But I should think he would appreciate how much you love him and try and help too," I said.

"He does," she answered. "Why this is the first time this season."

"Well, I think you are awfully good to stand it," was all I could say, and I went to her and kissed her.

She put her arms about me almost hungrily and said:

"Dear girl, I do try to be good"—with a vehemence and tone I wished Robert could have heard. I felt it would settle his drinking forever.

That was by no means the end. Mr. Nevermind continued to drink; Miss Melloweye, to cry and drag him out of Cafés; and he, to abuse her brutally.

Mr. Softlee still took his bit of lunch and beer with me, and I was beginning to realize that I should be lonely if he ceased to do so, and I had settled down to a comfortable enjoyment of this really cozy arrangement.

We were quite in the middle west when, one evening, in the theatre, which was limited as to dressing rooms, the straw colored hair heavy woman and I had to share one of these box like compartments.

My roommate was in a particularly ugly frame of mind. The travel had been hard, and hotel food ceases to give much nourishment, at least of the kind that is needful to make up for broken sleep and nerve racking train journeys. As was the custom, she was "kicking" at this and the other thing, hotels, managers trains, and the profession generally.

"—— but that —— fool Melloweye gets on my nerves so," she finally sputtered, "she actually went to a club at two o'clock yesterday morning and had them produce Robert for her so that she could take him home. Nice name the company will get if things keep up like this!"

"How did she know he was not in the hotel?" I asked. We had all had after performance lunch together that night in the big dining room, and I had seen Stella go to her room directly we finished.

"Oh see here," Miss Sears turned on me almost aggressively, "I hate these simple minded people who let men carry their satchels for them. The baby eye doesn't go down with me. You know quite as well as I do what she and Nevermind are to each other."

Did I? I wonder now, as I look back, if my woman's intuition had not told me all along, but that I did not wish to believe it. It must have been so. Or was I getting used to a condition of life brought

about by intimate association daily, hourly, with men who should have been polite acquaintances only, and had I already lost the sensibility to feel repulsion at such a statement? Or, again, was it because that same intuition told me that the woman who was robbing another at that moment of my respect for her, was herself of the same stripe as the one she defamed?

It was long ago. I was very young. I have been through so much since that my feelings of that time are now confused and vague.

I remember I made no answer, no sound; simply went on with my dressing, and still the vituperation continued from my roommate.

"And ——, what a poser she is before you. Gee, but it is funny. She is a wonder. She'll look at you with those great big eyes of hers and say, 'I don't know what bread and butter means'; and you believe her. I used to, too. Gee, I'm no prude, but I can't go her gait. I'm open and above board in anything I do. ——! if I was going to make such a bluff at the pure and holy I'm —— if I'd go after a man at a public club in the early morning hours."

I still said nothing. It seemed useless, and, indeed, my comments were not wanted. To a certain extent this burst came from overwrought nerves, and she would be more than sorry on the morrow for her remarks and also most tremulous lest they reach the ear of the victim.

Miss Melloweye walked to the hotel with Mr. Softlee and me that night, her eyes swollen, and her manner

dejected. Nevermind had escaped her vigilance again and left the theatre before she finished dressing for the hotel.

We all three lunched in my room, and Mr. Softlee did his best to cheer our mournful leading woman. She ordered whiskey to drink, but Mr. Softlee countermanded it to the waiter, and we all had beer.

Again and again she would say: "I wish I was dead. I wish to God I was dead." "Now, Stella," Mr. Softlee met this with, "you are a woman of experience enough to know what the result is when a girl takes a man too seriously."

"If I did not love him so much I wouldn't care," she cried, "but he is all the world to me now."

Was my heart aching for her at that moment? I do not know. I think I only felt numb, apathetic. "Take a man too seriously"; that was what loving a man and wanting him to be something more than a drunken beast meant, was it, Mr. Steele Softlee? I could have hated him for saying it. Yet, perhaps, he meant something deeper than I could understand.

They left my room together, for which I was very thankful. I did not want to be alone with him then. Not then. And I hurriedly got into bed and put out the light as if the darkness might shut out "something" I hardly knew what, but something I sensed as repulsive.

Tired nature asserted herself, and I slept. How long I do not know, but I was aroused by the sound of sobbing, so clearly it sounded as if it was in my room.

I sat up in bed and looked around. Between my room and the next was a door and transom. This latter was open, and the light from the other room streamed in on my floor. The sobbing came loudly through the opening, and then I distinguished Miss Melloweye's voice, wet, choked with tears, and piteous:

"Oh, God, forgive me. God have mercy! You know I do try to do what is right. How wicked I am, yet you, in your infinite mercy, can forgive!"

She was praying. I almost joined her in thankfulness. Miss Sears was a spiteful, malicious gossip; wilfully robbing this girl of her good name to me; who so admired her. It probably was wrong to listen now, indelicate to intrude on her communion with her God, but it filled me with such joy to feel she was all I had thought or hoped, that spellbound, entranced, I waited:

"God! God! God! If you cared how I suffered you would forgive everything, everything. It is because I love so much! so much! I cannot help it. If you have given me the nature, surely you who read our hearts must judge. Oh! God! God! God!"

This was followed by a torrent of tears, loud heart-breaking groans and sobs; and then the light went out, and I knew she must have been on her knees in her night dress and had now gone to bed.

The sobs continued softly, miserably, until it became unendurable to me. She was a good woman, her soul in anguish because she loved an unworthy beast. I would go to her and give her my sympathy

and comfort her. That was all she needed, some pitying heart to hold her close and tell her not to grieve.

I sprang to my feet at last, and throwing on a long wrapper, started for her door. As I did so, another sound froze me to the spot on which I was standing. The door on the other side had opened. I heard a shuffling, heavy body lumber into the next room. The sobbing ceased as if by magic, and the softest, most cooing albeit tear damp voice murmured:

"Is that you Robert, dear?"

A grunt from "the beast"; a heavy shoe thrown with a thud on the floor; and I broke from my trance to fly to the elevator, and demanded of the boy to tell the clerk in the office to give me another room at once! at once!

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MISS GRAY IS VERY UNPROFESSIONAL.

As I mentioned in the case of Miss Sears, the constant unvarying food of hotels, the unseemly hour in which trains are "caught," the nerve racking journeys for one-night stands, are not conducive to very robust health, and mine must have begun to be undermined sometime before the incidents at the close of the last chapter. However, it was not until that experience that I felt a heavy fever, an almost never ending throbbing in my head and a general depression verging on melancholia.

I tried to be the same to Miss Melloweye as I had been before I knew the (to me) terrible state in which she was living, but I know I failed dismally, while she, seeing my physical condition, attributed my actions to ill health and was more than kind and solicitous.

In fact I now met an enigma. I was a "sick little girl," and my heretofore avowed detestors were most kind and sympathetic. Even Mrs. Biber would insist on giving me a bit of whiskey from her flask when the jump was particularly early, and I looked unusually pale. So when we are called a good-hearted and generous people, here is your occasion when it becomes apparent.

But my comforter and stay was Mr. Steele Softlee. No brother could have been kinder. I never knew where my satchel was from one journey to another. On some occasions he even packed the theatre trunk for me, as I had, on each night stand, to care for a large wardrobe trunk which carried the "extra girls' " dresses. He took me from the trains to hotels in a carriage and paid the expense. If I expressed a desire for any delicacy, it was mine for the asking. He entertained and amused me, in fact devoted himself to me so absolutely that I began to feel a faith and reliance in him and dependence upon him which was absorbing. What wonder, can you tell? I was a girl, alone, among strangers, with no woman's heart protection, no woman companion to whom I could go if I felt a sense of temptation in such an element. Such a fear in this case would have brought forth laughter; a jest from the women with whom I associated. What wonder that a kind solicitous man who gave to me just the sympathetic quality for which my soul was craving should win my faith, my affection, especially when added to this was the deference bestowed upon me by the other members of the company just from the fact, that I was the recipient of this man's attention.

The events which follow came on so gradually that the telling of them is harsh to what the actual occurrence was at the time.

My fever was very high one night, the aches and pain in my bones became almost unbearable during

the performance. Somewhere in our travels I had contracted a well developed case of ague. My nerves thoroughly unstrung, it seemed I could bear no more, and while vainly attempting to swallow my midnight lunch, with my kindly companion beside me, gently urging me to "try and cheer up," I burst into the same emotional torrent of tears which Miss Melloweye was so given to shedding; wild, tempestuous sobs. I have heard on every hand that they denote "the artistic temperament," but I know from my first experience with them that they are merely the exaggerated expression of misdirected energy, of overwrought, uncontrolled nerves which at other times is apt to explode itself in violent fits of temper.

In an instant my faithful friend's arms were about me, and I felt myself held in a soft sympathetic embrace, soothing, comforting, peaceful. It was not strange, nor unnatural that his sympathy should take this form of expression. Perhaps for days I had expected it; undoubtedly for days desired it. Any child will long to throw itself on some compassionate breast and comfortably cry out its woes. That I had fallen in love with this man never entered my consciousness, and I know now that I never really did. Yet I wanted to be petted and comforted, and I even accepted his kisses as crumbs from the table of human sympathy. A mother, a sister, a brother would have been the same to me then, but they being denied me, the way was clear for anyone who would give me the tenderness for which my soul was

craving. What more natural? Yet what, oh, heavenly powers! more insidious? It never came to me for a moment what must be his thoughts and emotions until he had gone, and I was calm; then I began to realize faintly that I had given myself, for the first time, into the arms of a man who had spoken no word of love to me, upon whom I had no claim, and yet whose kisses I now felt had been warm and loverlike.

The blood began to tingle in every vein and a new, another, emotion seized me as I thought this man had grown to love me. That such a realization is sweet to any girl, even though she may not return the passion, came upon me fully then. Then again, came a sense of my attitude in the affair. Had I unconsciously encouraged him by accepting his attentions without question? Undoubtedly, then, I owed him a duty; either to love him too, or at once cease all friendly relationship. This latter proposition struck me cold with fear. He had become so much a part of my daily life that I dared not give him up. "And I am ill," I whimpered, "and need someone to love me." But possibly the unexpressed dread of once more being ostracized by the company, as I knew I should surely be if I took the stand of conventionality and lost this protection, weighed greatly in his favor.

He was so much older than I though he was only forty years, still old enough, then, to be my father; yet he was gracious, gentlemanly in his bearing, and,

from a theatrical standpoint, exceedingly good looking; being of a rather robust type with good features, almost dreamy eyes, and thick wavy hair, slightly touched with gray. I began to be a bit puffed up and flattered that a man of his years and dignity should have even noticed humble me, and after a little more musing and after the nerve force had spent itself, in the reaction, something akin to happiness came over me, if not exactly peaceful in quality at least exhilarating, which latter element we are more apt to heed, at the time than the lack of the former, and I fell asleep to dream of what appeared a new found joy.

Mr. Softlee's attitude from then on, even before the members of the company, was one of possession; and I submitted, flattered by being thus absorbed. There was a woman's natural pride in the knowledge that people were aware I was the object of this man's affection, yet I secretly resented that "these women" became even more friendly and familiar towards me when I knew, after what I had learned by associating with them, that their ideas and mine about love and lovers were totally at variance.

Under the stimulus of this new interest I became very much better, and I suppose I apparently glowed with happiness. Mr. Softlee's luncheon visits now lasted sometimes until after one o'clock in the morning and I had several times to ask him please to go that I might get a little sleep before train time. However, there was no impropriety in this to me, for by this

time I had resigned myself to the fact that here was the one man Providence had selected for my husband (although I had rather hoped not to marry so young), and I was doing my best to look upon him as such even though he had, as yet, said no word on that vital subject.

Probably it may be necessary for me to explain that I had been brought up with the strict idea that only the man a girl was to marry should have the right to kiss her, unless it was her father or her brother. I have learned since that such is not the training of a great many girls and numbers of love affairs, considered eminently proper, have only the element of pastime in them. But at that period of my life the very surroundings and environment made the situation even more sacred to me. I had granted this man the privilege of sitting in my room until early hours of the morning, petting and making love to me, and that, I felt, belonged only to the one who was to protect me for the rest of my natural life.

I must have been born with the unhappy fate to overhear things evidently not intended for my ears. But under these circumstances this is not strange when one considers that hotel rooms run along a hall, side by side, with only thin doors and transoms between; that dressing rooms nearly always have the thinnest of partitions; and that it is in these environs that the actor spends his traveling existence.

At all events, Miss Gaily, with whom I happened to be sharing a dressing room one night, went out

rather noisily and it must have been supposed by those in the next room that we were both on the stage.

I was reading, as I had quite a wait, and at first took no notice of the hum of voices coming through the thin partition, until I recognized Mr. Softlee's sonorous tones and naturally I pricked up my ears.

"Hello, Biber," I heard him say, "aren't you in this act?"

"Of course," returned the character woman, "I've had my scene. What struck you to pay me a visit? Everybody else busy, eh?" and she laughed good naturedly.

"No, no," he chaffed back, "you know, Biber, your old college chump. Where's that bit of a flask of yours?"

"Here you are, but don't be a pig. That darling baby of yours might look pale in the morning, and I have to keep some on hand for her."

They both laughed now, and I heard Billie, who must have been in the room before Mr. Softlee entered, call out:

"Here! don't be a pig, she said, save some for the only juvenile actor worthy the name in the business. Here, ma, you get the rest."

From the silence I judged a round was being drunk out of Biber's ever handy silver flask.

"Ah, h—h—," I could almost hear Mr. Softlee smack his lips, "that's the stuff. I've been filling

up on beer until I'm actually afraid I'll turn into a brewery."

"Won't she stand anything stronger yet?" chimed in Billie. "Why you're slow with your education."

"Nop," returned Softlee, "but I'm just as glad. God keep her sweet and young as long as you can," say I.

"That's a nice compliment to me," returned she of the whiskey treat.

"Now, Biber, don't get touchy," cooed my admirer, "we all know a little nip is necessary to a good fellow like you." But Biber evidently felt hurt, for there was a catlike touch in her voice as she said:

"Child stealing this season, eh boy?"

"Oh, I don't know," slangily from the accused. "Little Steele can give these younger boys a lesson or two," and I felt instinctively that he was looking in the glass admiringly at himself.

"Oh rats!" from Billie, "anybody can get next to a greeny like that."

"That will do, young man," Softlee exclaimed, "you made certain bets when we left New York, but she didn't bite."

"Aw, I didn't want her," said Billie disgustedly. "She's too —— good. I want flesh and blood, not a frozen fish."

"Is that so?" and there was a world of insinuation in Mr. Softlee's tone.

Biber laughed loudly. "Why, Billie," said she, "you don't suppose Steele has been waiting his time do you?"

"Oh, no," protested Mr. Softlee, "I assure you, on my honor she's a perfect little lady. A perfect lady."

Billie must have jumped suddenly to his feet now, and I never remember to have heard as much anger in his voice before. "Say, I won't stand for that Biber; I'm black, but by God I know a good girl when I see one. Gray is all right and I won't stand for that!"

"Well, who said she wasn't," coolly from Mr. Softlee, "surely not I who am her best friend."

A peal of laughter from Biber, and an angry "Oh —! you make me sick," from Billie, and he flounced out of the room.

"I believe he's a little bit struck on her himself," said Mr. Softlee as the door banged shut. "Well she's a winner, all right."

"You've got me how you do it, you old grandfather you," chaffed this woman whose daughter, I knew then, was a girl no older than the one she was jesting about.

"Handsome Willie," geyed Softlee, and again I mentally saw him look in the glass and pat his curls in a way actors have of imitating vanity.

"Rot!" grunted Biber.

"Well, no, seriously," went on this man, "these younger fellows don't know the ropes. They go at a girl aggressively in a 'Have-me-or-I'll-kill-you sort

of attitude.' Now we older guys just bide our time. We are patient. We wait and make the first feint when something has happened to hurt her feelings, and she wants a sympathetic word or hand clasp. Then, when the travel is hard and the food bad and health isn't exactly robust and there grows and grows a yearning for 'Mamma,' and she's tired and heart hungry, 'little Willie' steps in with his 'hush-a-bye-baby,' and, presto, she's won."

It was banter, jest, ridicule, guying; it brought forth another peal of laughter from Biber; but, God in heaven it was the truth! The truth!! The truth!!! It was a caricature of the whole story, and sitting there in that bare little dressing room cold, horror stricken, my book clasped tightly to me, I saw in a flood of the light of new knowledge what was meant when they talked of "taking a man too seriously." Yet, with more terrifying poignancy, I realized, too, that while this man had never in word or look suggested to me even an insinuation of improper conduct, he was, nevertheless, willing that others should think I was his property to any lengths. No wonder he had never spoken of the more pertinent side of our love, the deeper, lifelong part of it. I had been satisfied to think it a silent understanding between us, when here I learned the truth. There was to be no deeper side. I was simply this season's plaything to a man old enough to be my father, who was probably still being patient and waiting. Oh, God! it was too horrible.

My saving grace had been then, so far, that I had not fallen in love with him deeply. But oh! I have seen girls since in the same position whom such a revelation would have cost their heart's blood in agony; to whom it would have meant so much that, even if they had heard "him" say it, they would have gone on loving "him" just the same, going to any lengths to keep "him" by their sides. This undoubtedly had been the way poor Stella began, and being of a deeply passionate nature, she knew no bounds when once her affections were won.

But in me had no passion been kindled, therefore, I could look the situation coldly in the face. That I had permitted this man even to make love to me, now filled me with disgust and repulsion, but not disappointment. I thanked God for it then. I thank Him for it now. If it was, as Billie had said, the lack of "flesh and blood" in me, then may the immortal gods be praised for my iceberg nature at that time.

Yet the humiliation in the revelation of this man's true character can never be expressed. If disappointment there was, therein it lay. One by one my idols had been shattered at my feet. I now had no one, not even a friend in the company, for I felt, sitting there, the sound of his voice in my ears, that if he spoke to me again I could gladly kill him.

I managed to get out of the theatre and to the hotel before Mr. Softlee knew it, leaving the wardrobe trunk unpacked. I got my satchel from my room, paid my bill, and in the darkness of the night stole

down to the depot of the town. My personal trunk was in the hands of the property man who collected it on one-night stands from the hotel while we were at the performance. So I must trust to luck to get it sometime later on. My only thought, now, was to get away where I should never see that man again.

Poor fool; as if Steele Softlee was alone in such villainy; as if I wasn't to meet hundreds of the same stripe—but at that time I felt he was the only man on earth capable of such a trick as this to a girl of seventeen.

A train was pulling in at the station when I reached it, and I got on board, not knowing which direction it was going, nor its destination. I sank into a seat and took out my chamois money bag. I did not know whether I had enough to get to New York, but I did not care. I could go somewhere and then telegraph for some money from home.

When the conductor came along, I found that luck was with me. The train I was on was bound for New York, and the fare and sleeping berth considerably inside of the contents of my chamois bag. I sent a telegram from the first station at which we stopped, telling the manager I was no longer a member of the company and asking him to ship my trunk to an address in New York City and then tumbled into my berth, actually glowing with genuine enjoyment that I was free from it all, and blissfully unconscious that I had done the most absurdly unprofessional thing, as far as the management was concerned, it has ever been my lot to hear of since that time.

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE RETROSPECTION.

A day's journey alone gave me ample time for meditation, and as I went over the scenes, living those few months again, day by day, my resentment and disappointment grew apace. I had entered a profession which was inviting to me as an *art* and one which gave every promise of granting not only a livelihood, but also of opening new channels of life, with opportunity for travel, for association with artists and that which was artistic, a mind as well as purse-filling employment. I was ambitious and had faith in my capabilities; was perfectly willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder and even to work my way slowly to whatever position for which I might be best fitted by any quality that I might develop. Nevertheless, here I had run away from my first much-sought-after, yearned-for engagement before the season had passed, not because of any setback as to my work or the management's lack of appreciation, or encouragement, but purely from the burning and overwhelming disappointment in the *association*; the people personally with whom I ate, drank, and lived; for players moving about the country are constantly in one another's society to the exclusion practically of all other intercourse.

Seldom had we met any other person not in some way connected with the theatre, and the limited time given to each city or town, together with the fatigue attendant on constant travel and performances, robbed one of any desire to visit places of interest belonging to localities in which we might be playing. In fact a general closing of the eyes to all that is around us, save the train, hotel, and theatre, is the average attitude of the much traveled Thespian. On this, my first trip, I had been quite severely "guyed" by almost every member of the company for my ejaculations of pleasure at the glorious autumnal tints of the woods of Pennsylvania. Hardly anyone ever looked from the car windows. The men spent the journeys mostly in smokers at cards or with novels, the women sleeping, reading or gossiping, waiting for such of our men as might drop into the seats beside them and also gossip away a few tedious hours. Far from enjoying this opportunity to see our country we spent our time complaining (kicking I learned is the vernacular) about "the early jumps," "the bad hotels" (all hotels seem bad to an actor), "the bum dressing rooms" in the last stand, or the unappreciative people who comprised the audience in such and such town. In fact I can now say, in looking back over twenty years of almost constant travel and association of this sort, it is simply an ugly, yet universal, habit of the traveling actor to find absolutely nothing of interest in a season's tour on the

road, but everything with which to find fault and become disgruntled.

That there are exceptions to this mental condition only goes to prove the rule. I have met exceptions, but they were generally so sneered at by their fellows if they did express any interest in nature, or points of local fame, that they soon ceased to speak of it and were really forced to get such enjoyment out of it as they could, alone.

I may not refer to this subject again, and I wish to be plainly understood. The fact that a theatrical career gives opportunity for travel does not necessarily mean that such a chance will be appreciated. One may, in his body, go entirely around this mundane sphere and yet, mentally, never leave 40th Street and Broadway, where his engagement was procured.

I remember once of closing a season in Philadelphia and remarking, that it was such a good time to stay there a few days to take in the sights of historical interest which had helped to make our nation, and being met with a chorus of—"Well, me for the first train for dear old New York. I can't get out of this hole quick enough."

Still, in my retrospection on the train that day, these things became trivial and constituted a small part of my disappointment. As I looked back to the very first days of my meeting with the company I had left, I was sick at heart when I remembered the veneer of affability and graciousness each one assumed; the gentle, kindly manner of the director; the polite

acquiescence to his ideas; the magnificent assumption of good breeding. And then to realize it had been possible with most of them to keep it up but five short days! Why assume such manners in the first place, only to deceive and mislead people? Alas, it was a pose which fitted so ill it soon fatigued them and became quite too cumbersome to wear.

Then I took myself severely to task for any feeling whatever regarding the personality of my companions. Why should it matter to me what they were? That was a question for the individual. There was no necessity for us to be on such intimate terms, and I should have treated them all with dignity and reserve. That struck me as a laughable statement. Let them alone? Why, bless you, they wouldn't allow one. My natural reserve, which I brought from home, was the laughing stock and jest of all until one of the number took a personal interest in me and showed my companions I was really not so "chesty" as I appeared. Besides, I had supposed I was to be in the society of people of artistic tastes and culture. Naturally, we look for these qualities in people of a profession which calls, one would suppose, for brains and an æsthetic temperament. But now I saw what Miss Gaily meant when she told me, when we first started out, that "any old thing can go on the stage." The requisite is not "has he temperament, talent, breeding, or adaptability," but merely "does he wish to be an actor?" That is the only consideration. It pleases a certain person to place himself before the public gaze. Dis-

cipline, education, breeding for such a sphere are not considered for a moment, only his personal desire to "go on the stage."

In this company we had several members of unmistakably low birth, who in spite of prosperity, never lost their ear marks. On the other hand, Mrs. Im. Biber came from a good family in England, one of her ancestors having been a man of much distinction in the British Parliament. She was a woman, however, whose good birth showed only in certain indefinable evidences of manner, a naturally rather stately bearing and a way of crushing one which was really imperious. Yet her conversation was often couched in the same slangy phrases which characterizes that of nine-tenths of our people of the dramatic profession; a slang belonging peculiarly to the theatre, as it often embraces expressions quite without meaning to an average "outsider."

Since I have mentioned Mrs. Biber, in my backward glance, I must go on and state what, even to-day, is repulsive to me and what I have avoided writing in these pages so far, but as it has bearing on my story in other chapters the fact must be recorded.

We had not been on the road a week when I found that this woman of some fifty odd years, with several grown children scattered about the profession, was, what was called "a melancholy tippler." I use the term because she usually eschewed the society of every one, only on rare occasions entering into such a social gathering as that in her dressing room the night of my

flight. She was no more brusque with me than with the other women at times, and the men she tolerated just long enough to take a "nip" with them in her room or on the cars. In other words, if the boys were short of "skee," Biber was sure to have some and willing to help them out. I mention this with reluctance; for I believe in her case it was a disease, but though I never saw her so that she could not walk nor retain her faculties, I am positive I never knew her when she was wholly and clearly sober. I never spoke to her without being confronted with a most nauseous breath of sour liquor embracing all the foul smelling evidences of a diseased stomach.

In one city, in which we played, one of her sons, who was with a rival company at another theatre, spent a week with her. He appeared to be quite a fine young fellow, very fond of his mother, and, so far as I could see (and I must confess I took especial notice), he was a total abstainer; although I saw him on several occasions get his mother's flask filled for her. In fact that highly engraved silver article had been a gift from him.

This woman was a finished artist and, I believe, was always in demand for engagements at a good salary in character work. Personally, she isolated herself and made no friends. As to her attitude towards me, I have before stated she had a daughter almost my age in a traveling company; yet whether I lived or died, was subject to temptations, or needed a tender woman's companionship or guidance, was of no more

moment to her than if I had been in Egypt; and I know, from later development, she expected no better treatment from others for her daughter, who was always away from her. The girl was earning her living, and the statement that "she was old enough to take care of herself" seemed all-sufficient for this self-centered, tipping mother.

I need not comment on Miss Sears; she of the divorce and straw colored hair. This lady was too patently rough and common to deceive any one. A sensitive nature would naturally shrink from her after one or two conversations. But may I not say that the gentle, kindly, and sweet bearing of the utterly unmoral Stella Melloweye was most dangerous to the unsophisticated? She was tremendously lovable, gentle and refined. The almost incessant "God," that punctuates the ordinary conversation of both sexes in the profession, I never heard from her. I also believe that she was, in a vague, æsthetic way, religious. That is, I am sure she believed in a God; a personal God if you will, and yet she had no fear of Him. I think she knew and appreciated right from wrong, still I call her *unmoral* rather than *immoral*, for I am sure she firmly believed she was right in living up to her highest law, which was founded on the pursuit of personal happiness. "To love and be loved" was her Nirvana, her end and aim of life, and that such love should have full vent, full sway, was her "conviction absolute." And while she suffered keenly (in fact I think she never knew an

unemotional, nor peaceful moment), this was never from a pang, nor qualm of conscience. Her trials lay only in the unkind fate which made her place her affections this year on a drunkard, next year, perhaps, on a man who either tired of her or had some other to claim him; this latter fact, however, not being, as a rule, of much importance in her ethics.

But the crowning enigma to me then, was her sincere belief in her own, not only respectability, but purity. I am positive, had any one accused her of moral wickedness, she would have been as incensed and wounded as any Penelope. This was clearly demonstrated in her attitude towards me in the first stages of our acquaintance. I was a much talked of "freak," if you will, who had, as yet, not learned the ways of the world, and Miss Melloweye gave me to understand in all our earlier talks, that she was the same kind of commodity. It made very little impression on me then, for any suspicion to the contrary had not entered my mind.

Of the men, I have dealt with but four, although the company boasted ten. But they were "birds of a feather and so flocked together." If there was one of a stamp any better than the rest, he did not, in the weeks I was with them, see fit to show his true character. On the traits of Mr. Temper, the stage manager, I will not dwell now. I have others to write about later. Mr. Nevermind I knew but slightly. I could only judge of him from his conduct as I observed it from day to day. I think

his, too, was an unfortunate case. He seemed to drink from the same reason that he had brown eyes. I do not believe he was a vicious man, and he was *unmoral* in precisely the same way as was Stella—because he knew no higher ideal than his own desires.

Nor do I consider Billie a dangerous type, which might be placed under the head of “temptations which beset a young girl launching out on a theatrical career.” He was too palpably vulgar and coarse to be anything but repulsive to almost any well brought up young person. His thick, sensual lips and bloated face would hardly have deceived a baby, but what was really his one redeeming quality was, as I had heard him say, “he knew a good girl when he saw one” and I add, to complete my statement, with firm conviction, he did—and *he had absolutely no use for her*. She inspired in him no emotions whatever. She was simply beneath his *contempt*. That he was connected with the management and a chum of his might count on some special favors, I found to be true, but as far as following Miss Gaily’s advice and “being nice to him” was concerned, it would have availed me nothing had I chosen to do so. To advance one in her profession might have been in his power, but it was of no use to a good girl to apply.

No, men like Billie are not dangerous. But the type under the head of Steele Softlee most decidedly is. His own words are more than volumes. “I wait until she is tired or ill and her whole nature cries for a comforter.” Great Powers! could the

proposition be more unfair? A bird charmed by a snake has almost a better chance for life. If mine were an isolated case, this man the only one of his kind, I would not even have gone through the humiliation of recording these incidents——But I am anticipating. My retrospection is supposed to cover only my own experiences as far as I had gone that season.

* * * *

As I stepped from the train at Jersey City, my backward look had been so black that I kept saying to myself over and again, "There are none righteous; no not one"; and a sore and heavy heart bade me go on in my journey until I reached the little place up in the snow covered hills of New England, called home. Then I saw the lights and heard the hum of the great city and remembered with what a thrill I had first met them as, full of hope, enthusiasm, and aspiration I had entered that great throbbing metropolis to seek a career. Go home defeated after a few disappointing months? I could not explain my reasons, and every one would say I had failed from lack of talent. Oh, that fiendish pride which fears to feel itself wounded! How it keeps us at our task in spite of everything! I felt my possibilities were as great as they had been the day I chose my profession; that I must justify my faith in my ability and show to those at home that my talent was great

and would surmount all difficulties. Why should I turn back at my first disappointment?

As I entered the ferry, I began a new line of reasoning and one which had a more charitable aspect and was, to me then, much more full of wisdom. My experience had been limited. Here I was with only about fifteen weeks to my credit, judging all seasons, and, what is more, some three or four thousand people, by the paltry twelve or fourteen representatives I had the misfortune to be connected with so far. How small! How narrow! How perfectly absurd! I almost laughed aloud. Of course, I had only happened to strike that kind of company. There were undoubtedly splendid people in the profession. Excellent companies, and I must now do my utmost to become proficient so as to associate only with the best. That the company I had just left was one of very fair standing, was not conclusive evidence that all were of a like calibre. I had simply been unfortunate in that selection. Of course, I would gladly have accepted any position at the time this one had been offered me. I would probably be able to do a little better now, for I was not entirely an amateur.

By the time I reached the hotel where I had roomed before, I had argued myself into quite a cheerful frame of mind, and the trials and disappointments of the past weeks were memories only and not very poignant ones at that.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT AND THE OTHER GIRL.

How little I knew when I boarded that midnight train what it really meant to be out of an engagement in the middle of the season! After I had experienced this soul-trying situation, I often asked myself if a girl who did know what it meant, and with no other resources, would not have been compelled to stay on with the company even under those severely trying circumstances; perhaps eventually having to accept the situation in an assumption of the manners and life of those around her for the sake of a semblance of harmony if nothing else.

The agents looked at me blankly those winter days when I stated my desire for work, and I soon found there was nothing to do but wait until the spring opened when, I was told, some companies would be forming for the summer, or a few spring attractions would be put on, and, novice-like, I wildly hoped I might get into a New York production.

I have not before gone into the details of seeking an engagement in New York as my second effort was largely a repetition of my first and I felt to tell both would be tiresome. That it is full of unutterable

hardships is true, but I think the same can be said of any profession or trade. When there is one position to be filled, there are hundreds to fill it, and the result must indeed be a great struggle to be the fortunate one.

I procured my first engagement after months of climbing stairs to the offices of dramatic agents, after many ineffectual attempts at even an interview with desirable managers (or being most gruffly bellowed at, if by any chance I did express my wants to one of these luminaries) by paying an agent one hundred dollars to place me in a small part, in preference to even a more experienced girl; as after many trips to the office this person hinted to me such was the only proceeding possible for one with no training. How it was managed with Mr. Fudge, who engaged me, I do not know. He asked me no questions and apparently took it for granted I would do satisfactorily the work assigned to me.

When I went to see this agent, after I returned to New York, I was soundly censured for my unprofessional conduct in leaving the company as I did, and was informed that it would be very doubtful if I ever obtained another engagement. This I soon learned was an absurd statement. While there are legal contracts between actors and managers, there is absolutely no such thing as integrity on either side, although an actor naturally offends less often as the other party is in power, and such an action as mine, unbusinesslike in the extreme as it was, stood as the pink of good manners when weighed against

some I have since experienced from managers. I also felt sure, as this remark was being made to me, that another greasing of the fat little palm would not be amiss. But this I was not prepared to do. I did not come from a wealthy family; in fact it was necessary that I earn my living, and though my kindly relative had, after much argument and prophesying, assisted me to try the earning of it as suited my inclinations, the funds he had been able to provide me with were not inexhaustible by any means, nor was there a source of supply from which I could draw at will.

I was even then living on what I had brought from home, as my salary on the road had been at times insufficient to meet my expenses. Twenty or twenty-five dollars a week is an excellent salary for a working girl who has a home or lives in one city or town. It is a pittance in a traveling theatrical company. One is entirely at the mercy of hotels and their prices, as there is no time to look up cheaper boarding houses and it is not considered the thing to do, even if there was. Besides, the sleeping car berths are paid for by the individual and not the manager, and these alone, in a season, amount to a goodly sum. The small items needful to one's health and comfort inconvenienced as the actor is, being battered about from place to place, are legion, and the weekly stipend is usually gone before one realizes the various places into which it has disappeared.

Waiting in New York without friends is wearisome business, and my loneliness became almost greater than I could bear. I haunted the agencies, even though I knew what the result would be, just for the sake of some one to speak to and to hear the other unemployed Thespians gossip about their more fortunate brothers and sisters; and again made my ineffectual attempts at interviews with the "desirables."

Woe-begone and weary, I sat in my small, cheerless room, one blustering March night, wondering if the fame and wealth I sought would ever compensate me for those hours of loneliness and melancholy I was enduring, when I was aroused from my lethargy by the sound of some one in evident distress. I waited a moment and then opened my door. The noise seemed to come from the room across the hall, and now I distinguished sobs with groans and cries of pain. I listened intently to discern any voices and finally decided the sufferer was alone.

Later in my life I would have rung for the bell boy and had him report the disturbance to the office. But I was still "green" that winter's night, and after one or two heart faint qualms as to what I might discover, I tremblingly rapped at the door through which the sounds were wailing.

A sobby "come in," accompanied by a moan; and I turned the knob. The room was exactly like the one I occupied, small, narrow, and boasting of a shaft window only for light and ventilation. A bed, bureau,

washstand, two chairs, and a table, with unpapered, glaring white walls, and the average, moderate hotel's poorest rooms are adequately described.

On the bed lay a young woman about four years my senior, her hair disheveled, her cheeks crimson, and her eyes half closed and glassy. She was partially undressed, as if she had attempted to disrobe to go to bed and had been overcome. The sour, alcoholic odor from the refuse in a washbowl beside the bed told even my inexperienced nostrils what was causing her suffering; but while this knowledge on my first visit to New York would have caused me to close the door and call others to assist her, I had already seen enough of this sort of thing not to be shocked at it now, and it was, therefore, without any emotion other than pity that I approached her and asked if I could do anything for her. She only tossed her arms about and moaned louder than ever and then burst into wild, uncontrollable weeping.

The tears of unrestrained nerves and emotions were not new to me, and they did not excite my sympathy to the extent they had formerly done. I went to the pitcher and poured some water on a towel and laid it on her head. After a minute the sobbing became more plaintive and a childish lisp of "Mother! oh, mother!" escaped in a doleful moan. Again I cooled the towel and placed it on the throbbing head, and she sighed as if in great relief.

"You're very good to me," she said after a time. "Who are you?"

"Your neighbor across the hall," I answered. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you," she said; then, tossing her arms about again, she began to moan, but this time not from pain.

"Oh! what must you think of me?" she asked. "You won't believe me, I know, but I drank champagne for the first time in my life to-night, and this is what it did to me."

Six months ago I would have believed her gladly, but I now thought of Miss Melloweye and what Miss Sears had called her "bread-and-butter" look as she proclaimed her religious training and her love of "home and mother." I could only murmur something about being sorry and asked if I could not help her to bed. She allowed me to assist her like a little child, ever and anon exclaiming "You are so good. What should I do without you?" and I soon had her comfortably tucked in with the towel, wet with cold water, tightly bound about her head. After putting the room to rights, I turned out the light.

"I wish you would kiss me good night," she said as I opened the door; "I'm not bad, really, though this looks so. You see I dined 'not wisely but too well,' and I have a dear mother and sister far away from here who would be so grateful to you if they knew what you had done for me."

In spite of my very superior knowledge of things of the world, I believed her then. I kissed her and wished her a restful sleep.

Does not the opening of our hearts in sympathy blind us to all else, but the suffering of a fellow creature and win from us something stronger than even pity? I do not know that such is the case always, but I do know that my heart went out to this girl that night and gave her a sister's love that has endured all these years, so that I find it hard, even now, to write about her whom I would much more gladly have rest in a peaceful memory all her own. Or possibly it was because I was so hungry for companionship that I seized this pretext to invite some one into my empty life as a drowning man catches at straws.

I felt that my new acquaintance was really a good girl who had been, possibly on this occasion, indiscreet, yet who she was or what she was doing alone in New York I did not know. I too was alone; oh, so much alone! How often had I said over and over to myself those lines:

“ 'Tis midst the crowd, the hum, the shock of men,
To hear, to see, to feel and to possess,
And roam along the world's tired denizen,
With none to bless us, none whom we can bless.
None that, with kindred consciousness endued,
If we were not, would seem to smile the less.
Of all that flatter'd, follow'd, sought and sued;
This is to be alone, this, this is solitude.”

and here was a kindred spirit I had been fortunate enough to be able to help a bit.

I slept but little that night, listening often for a sound from the room opposite, but even that broken

rest was sweet, carrying with it, as it did, the realization that a human being was near whom I had a right to speak to, to be in sympathy with, and who, at this hour, was in a measure dependent upon me. It was as the breaking of a long silence, and the relief was very great. I carried her breakfast to her in the morning, for, of course, her head was aching so that she could not lift it from the pillow. But by afternoon, with a few doses of bromo, she was able to be up and about.

I found her to be a girl of considerable beauty; with soft wavy brown hair, limpid clear gray eyes of much loveliness of expression; the kind we term the Irish eye and know that that stands for beauty; an almost tilting nose of much piquancy, and a mouth of child-like sweetness and of the veritable cupid's bow design. These physical charms were enhanced by a manner of what might be termed native refinement, for I judged her opportunities at any great amount of culture had been limited; yet she was of a most highly strung, nervous temperament. She simply bubbled and effervesced continually. Life was one great nervous strain to her, one intense exaggeration. Nothing was ever plainly lovely or beautiful, but always superlatively "gorgeous, tremendous, absolutely divine." If she enjoyed anything it was with an almost straining of every nerve and muscle of her body, and if she sorrowed it was with the same unquenchable vehemence. In my quiet home city she would have been considered "flighty," but in the world of noise and

tension I had found her, she was only a bit of color in surroundings harmonious to her type. I say "type" advisedly, for out of this nervous force, which carries with it an insatiable ambition, come our stars and celebrities, and we dub this almost insane mental attitude, governed only by the uncontrolled nervous system, "the artistic temperament."

Yes, I found my young friend was, like myself, an actress. She had the advantage of me in that her experience covered a period of four seasons, so that she really was "an old professional"; but like me, she was out of work in the middle of the season, and life was looking pretty dark; that is, it would have looked so to me in her position, but some way she seemed to bubble good naturedly through it all.

A few days of companionship; and she told me the reason for her dismissal from the company she had begun the season with.

" 'Father,' you know, has a private car," she chirped airily perched on the footboard of my bed ("Father" was the appellation among actors of the star with whom she had trusted her season's fate), "and 'father' enjoys giving the merry little supper parties on said palace on wheels. Sometimes several were invited, sometimes only one. I was rather a small member of the company, and I wasn't honored until we had been out several weeks. 'Father' had been particularly kind to me for a number of performances and finally, one evening, asked me to go down to the car after the show and have the grand bite to eat. Me

for the highly flattered young lady. I bounced over to the hotel to get on the fine dress for such an occasion when in walks Miss Goodstreak. Now you know she'll never be hanged for virtue, nor her purity, and they do say terrible things about her, but she had been good to me, especially as she was a big member of the company and I such a small fry. She very seriously asked me if I was going to sup with his high and mightiness the 'st-a-r,' and I proudly informed her that I was. She said, 'No, you aren't if I can help it.' Of course, I thought her exceedingly rude and disagreeable, probably a bit jealous. But she told me some of the most awful things about this master of art, until I did get a mite squirmish. However, me for the fine taking care of myself and told her I was going anyway, whereupon she locked the door and after remarking I would go only over her dead body, settled herself comfortably with a cigarette and stayed all night in my room."

Mentally, I asked God to bless this woman who "would never be hanged for her virtue," and I said something to this effect in commenting.

"Oh, yes," agreed my friend, "often that kind of a woman is the best sort of a friend to a good girl."

"Perhaps she feels from experience and sorrow that the 'primrose path' is not so lacking in thorns but what she would save a girl from entering it," I went on.

"Perhaps," Miriam again agreed, "not that I needed her help, but people have such a queer idea that I'm

feather brained and flippant and don't care what I do. I know Goodstreak did, but she said no matter how far I went to the dogs afterwards, she wasn't going to stand by and see me take my first plunge. As though I ever would!" and I joined in her merry laugh of derision at the absurdity of such a proposition.

"Well," she went on, "I had to submit to my moral protector, but, of course, I did not dare to let 'father' know it was she who kept me from the supper; so when he gave me one of those killing frowns of his and thunderingly demanded to know 'by what right a mere shrimp of humanity such as I was dared to ignore the attentions of a lord of creation such as he,' I could only tremble and stammer something about not feeling well and then quietly prepare to take the abuse I felt sure would be heaped upon me. It came. Oh! it came in blasts;" and she rose and stretched herself, imaginatively, to the height of the great man whose disfavor she had gained and gave a most irresistible imitation of his almost foppish style of speech.— "Staring me straight in the face as he addressed his assistant stage manager he would say, 'Edward, ask that young fool with the green eyes if she thinks I'm running this company expressly to have her show the public what an imbecile she is. Her lines were spoken to-night with the exhibition of mentality we might expect from a three-weeks-old embryo.' This then was repeated with great solemnity by 'Edward'; 'father' listening attentively to see if he got it straight. Lovely? What? Oh, delightful! On other occasions

he would stand in the wings," once more perching herself on the footboard, "when I was trying my best to get through my scenes and talk to me so loudly I know the audience must have heard him. 'Hurry up, you fool. Take all night to say a few little verses. What in the name of all the gods is the idiot trying to do now? Stand on your head! Stand on your head and be done with it, the public paid two dollars a seat just to watch you. Of course *I* amount to nothing. It does not matter if I *never* get my cue. Take your time, idiot, imbecile, until by the time I would leave the stage you can imagine the condition of these none too vigorous nerves.'

Some way we were both laughing uproariously over this. The spectacle of this great celebrity taking the trouble to dodge about from wing to wing to throw such childish gibberish, yet in such a vituperative spirit, at a defenseless girl struck me as most ridiculous especially with my merry companion's way of telling it.

"Ye—s," she drawled, her pearly teeth gleaming good naturedly from her rosy mouth, "it sounds funny now, but the ogres of our childhood were never more terrible than this man when he begins his persecution acts. And it seemed all the more horrible because, on occasion, he could be so perfectly angelic and kind. However, I only had to stand his nonsense a couple of weeks, for, lo and behold! on the salary day following my 'failure to appear,' as they say in Court, I was given my notice with the side remark

from 'father's' personal representative, 'that my work was most unsatisfactory and Mr. Greatstar would politely suggest that I seek another profession; possibly that of nursery maid would be quite to my liking, as I could not only then be surrounded by those of my own mental calibre, but also by the pure and innocent whose society I evidently craved'; this latter a shot at the fact that I had been chummy with Goodstreak, yet couldn't make the car. But the crowning point of all was that the madame, 'father's' wife, didn't speak to me after she knew what I had done to her banker, although she was at the hotel and wouldn't have been at the supper had I gone. Can you beat that for the fine and beautiful?"

Then followed a long list of gossipy short comings of this great man in response to my dubious comments that such things could be in a good company and no one raise a voice in protest. This list was not only long, but I must say woefully black with scarcely a redeeming saving grace for this modern Aristippus, but as it was mostly what even my present informant had gathered from others, and what had become more or less tradition, I was glad not to accept it all nor do I care to record it.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ENGAGEMENT SECURED.

Though it had been highly amusing to hear Miriam's recital, I found myself a little perplexed that this had occurred in the company of a star who held a most exalted position and who, as he had said, received two dollars (and sometimes more) a seat for his entertainments. Where were my hopes of being associated only with the best if I was to meet, even there, such an element as this? I expressed this fear to the fair occupant of my footboard, but she waved her hands gaily in the air and cried:

"Oh, rubbish! I'm going to get on. Such things as that won't keep me down. 'There is always room at the top,' and *my* ambition knows no bounds. I'm afraid you are apt to be puritanical. One need not necessarily be like these people; and, besides, when one has reached the top she can pick and choose her associates. Art is beautiful and, to me, all absorbing, and I'm going to make a name and place for myself in it or perish in the attempt. Besides," she added, as she sprang lightly from her perch, "as the man sagely observed when he charged a poor mortal five dollars for a beefsteak, 'I need the money.' "

Gradually things began to take on a brighter hue for me. To Miriam Merriworld life was scintillating; not necessarily a holiday, but nevertheless something to be felt and enjoyed. Her exuberance and ambition were like a tonic to my faltering spirits, and I soon found myself reasoning in the same vein with her thoughts; that where there was youth, enthusiasm, ability, and ambition there were no obstacles. Such things as might occur to hinder progress were merely hitches and bumps, and must be utterly ignored as either nonexistent or merely be quietly stepped over.

It was certainly a bright and hopeful way to feel and gave to each day an impetus to forge ahead in spite of all. By working hard to perfect ourselves in our chosen profession, our opportunities surely would come; nothing could keep them back.

Of course, we pictured wonderful things for each other, and, absurdly, we wanted our careers to run along together. Just how we could both be great stars in one company did not seem very clear, but "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and we had determined, if possible, to make our future engagements together. Miriam being much more experienced than I naturally would come in for a more prominent rôle and position, and it ought not to be impossible that I could count on a small part in the same play. So whichever one of us obtained an interview with a manager was to "speak up right away for the other."

I loyally and stoutly asserted that I simply wouldn't accept an engagement without her; she gave my hand a sympathetic squeeze and said "Me too."

Another thing which helped to put a rosy tint on life as lived in New York, was an almost constant going to the theatre. The courtesy of a complimentary order to various places of amusement is extended to members of the same profession I now learned, and a great majority of the theatres gave to us waifs this privilege that winter. Miriam always did the asking, and I suppose the sparkling "something" of her personality made it hard even for such business representatives as stood at the doors, who were acknowledged boors, to refuse her.

It was like opening the gates of Paradise to me, this source of study; for in this sense only I took it; a chance to see others work, to become familiar with methods and technique. I remember, however, of secretly wondering at the unevenness of the work on, what should be, our representation stage; and seeing that some performances of great strength and brilliancy would come perilously near to being utterly ruined by one prominent member of the cast, perhaps the most advertised and featured of the attraction.

Again, it was pitiful to see what was to me a perfect cast, a perfect play, go down to the oblivion of a few weeks' "run" unhonored and unsung, though not always unwept, for many great hopes and aspirations are downed with what, to an unsupporting public, seemed only a casual failure. Yet again it was

humiliating to see most mediocre casts in a silly, hodge podge of stuff called a "farce" or "comedy" or "play" running for weeks and even months to an apparently most prosperous business. However, much of these two latter facts is in the hands of the public, and it is not the purpose of this book to deal with that much discussed and most complex body.

Besides the theatres, Miriam knew a few actors with whom she had played, and who were in some of the New York casts, and now and then they "treated" us to supper. It had been at such an affair that Miriam's indiscretion occurred which led to our acquaintance.

Some young fellow playing at one of the theatres had told Miriam to wait for him after the performance she was witnessing and they would have a bite to eat together. In the meantime a "man about town," who knew the actor, called for him and, on being told of the engagement with a young woman player, asked if he might join; keen at the prospect of dining with "an actress."

The easy, free comradeship which governs the actor's life made it quite the most natural thing that this man should be introduced to Miriam without her previously granted consent. And Miriam, too, took it in good fellowship, and when the interloper insisted on "buying her champagne" as she expressed it (the supposed daily nectar of all "actresses"), she became very curious to taste it, as it really was quite a thing to talk about "having been out to a champagne

supper"; and so the plunge was taken. "Fortunately," Miriam said, in telling me of the affair, "I didn't begin to feel the effects of it until I got into my room; so his 'man about town ship' didn't have the satisfaction of saying I was drunk. But that's what it was, wasn't it, Childie," and she buried her face in my lap, very much ashamed, I know.

The spring was beginning to open now, and my funds were getting pretty low; likewise those of my chum. My face had a way of pulling down rather long as this fact would come upon me in a rush of "Oh, what shall I do?" sort of way. But my merry companion always brought it back to a smile with a gaily caroled "cheer up, cherries are ripe" or a mock tragic exclamation, "Come with me I, too, have no home." In fact everything, even to facing homelessness, was a matter of burlesque and mockery. To think deeply and seriously was, to Miriam, little short of a crime.

"Oh, little child," she would cry vehemently "live, live! Be happy. That's your right. There is nothing that could be a real tragedy to me, but to fail;" her eyes would narrow into dangerous slits as she added, "and that's impossible."

Nevertheless we almost haunted the agencies, especially as there were rumors of spring companies being formed, but "nothing doing" was the usual greeting, and we would hurry away from one to face the next.

It sounds prosaic and flat to tell it, but journeys like that are only too often full of tragedy. When the girl who makes them has gone the rounds each morning and her little supply of money gets down to scarcely a five-cent piece to bless herself with and no place to send for more, the time is very ripe for the thousand and one temptations smiling at her from almost every side, or from every corner which she may be compelled to turn. Even the best of us object to being hungry.

One blue day I was sitting alone when Miriam came rustling into the room and executed a wild Indian dance around my chair, exasperating me beyond measure by keeping me asking over and again what was the good news, for good I knew it must be to have such an effect upon her.

When she had given off enough energy to make her so out of breath that she could hardly articulate, I gleaned that a fraternal being, named Everton Smitten, had told her of a company which was being formed to play a season of ten or more weeks in a city north of New York, and that she had managed to get an interview with the manager with the result that she had been engaged as leading lady (with great stress on the *lead*) and I was to get small parts.

"But he hasn't seen me," I protested.

"That makes no difference," and she grandly waived me aside with, "Everton had recommended me up to the sky and, of course, having been with 'father,' even if I did get my notice, cut a great figure with

this management, and I was very lofty as to salary, until I said I would make several concessions if a dear girl I knew could be in the company too. She was terrifically clever, I told him, and would be most valuable to him, and we would be willing to accept salaries of reasonable proportions if we could be in the same company, you see, dear," she explained. "It's not a great company and really organized on a 'speck,' as it keeps rather cool where we are to play in the summer, but I think they have pretty good backing; a railroad clerk or someone who has a few thousand dollars and is 'stuck on the show business,' so they are going to help him spend it.

"But it will be great study for us, as we play a new bill each week, ten pieces altogether, and that's what we both need—experience in a round of parts. Oh! oh! only fancy me the fine leading lady. I'll put a card in the dramatic papers '*Miriam Merriworld Leads*,' and I'll never accept an engagement for any other line of work," which rash remark she punctuated by giving me an enthusiastic hug.

Only the bright and rosy side of the fact that ten plays meant wonderful study, did we consider. But when we came bump against the realization that these ten plays called for an average of four gowns each, and that we had agreed to work for very low salaries we had to do some tall figuring. Only we didn't figure. After many years I now say it calmly, truthfully—we of the profession theatrical never do.

We just went ahead and bought gowns as we needed them; sometimes procuring an advance of salary from the management, sometimes asking the dressmaker and shopkeepers to wait for their money, keeping absolutely no trace of what we were spending, or borrowing nor how deeply we were running in debt; because, you see, it was simply glorious. Miriam was really doing beautiful work as a "leading lady," and I had several, what to me, were wonderful parts. To be sure, the plays were not always of the highest literature, but we were getting that much sought for, and needed, experience in our art, and that meant stock in trade for the future, we reasoned.

In the parlance of the day, I "take my hat off" to the stage manager of that company. As a director he was capable and kind and had no prejudices. Since we were rehearsing new plays all the time, the tax upon him was very great, yet I never heard him swear. As a man, outside the theatre, I knew scarcely anything of him. He spent his time with "the boys" and left Miriam and me entirely alone.

The character woman was a motherly sort, but a great gossip, and her stories of various people in the profession were not always delicate. In fact she cared only to relate the kind that savored of the unclean. I could hardly believe that there was so much vice in the world as this woman loved to recount. She reveled in it. It was meat and drink to her. Her mind dwelt on practically nothing else,

and yet, so far as her own life was concerned, I have no doubt it was fairly free from censure.

The "heavy woman" was an imperious sort of young person who was married to the comedian. They were not particularly clever, either of them, but that only in the opinion of others. They seemed to get along together very well, both being fond of going out to little beer gardens and partaking of Dutch lunches until early hours of the morning. Needless to say, they never knew their lines any too well, which fact did not make up for their lack of talent.

The ingenue, Dainty Heartscared, was of the same lovable temperament as Miriam, and she would keep us in a constant state of laughter by her quaint way of expressing herself. She was the wife of quite a prominent actor, a leading man, and she had held very good positions, only that season having been in a New York "run," but it closed early, and, she explained, "Sneak (as she called her husband) won't even pay my room rent when I'm out of work, so me for the summer stock snap; and I hope it lasts! I *hope* it lasts! I haven't saved a cent this season."

I remarked that I thought her husband should at least support her when she needed it, but she cheerily shook her head.

"Not him," she said, "he thinks I ought to be glad I'm living to be called his wife, let alone expecting anything from him."

I wondered if she loved him and by some leading questions found she did and that a great deal of her

gaiety was bravado to deceive herself into being happy in spite of things which, I soon discovered, were eating at her heart.

"You see," she told us once settling herself jauntily on a table in Miriam's and my dressing room, "Sneak was the leading man, and I was the ingenue of the 'Cherry Blossom' Company the season we were married, and we hadn't been in our second week of honeymoon before her ladyship, Ella Hardface (you know her, she's with the Bingtown repertory company this season), who was our leading lady, saw Sneak, and everything Ella sees, you know, is hers, all right; so, as I said, during the second week of our honeymoon I had the pleasure of yanking his nibs out of her amorous arms at a very small hour of the morning. Of course, I forgave him; she's such a piece of work, she simply pursues a man; *but*," and she waved a hair brush vigorously in our direction, "you can never put 'Humpty Dumpty together again.' I love him, yes, but there you are, and where are you?"

This bit of personal history brought forth from our gossipy companion Miss Talkie, the character woman, numerous stories about the woman in the case, some of them sickening in their vileness, but one which, if true, should have sent this fiend to the penitentiary for life. I would not mention it now, for, of course, I cannot personally vouch for it, only that I have heard it from so many different sources since, it must have some foundation, and also it shows the kind of stories told and the gossip which is carried on by this

fraternity. It was to the effect that this woman, Hardface, aided and abetted the manager of a company, in which she was playing, to compass the ruin of a very young girl, by pretending to protect her against the advances of this man and finally getting her in a trap in her own room. Miss Dainty Heart-scared did not doubt Ella's capability for such a diabolical act, but to me it seemed incredible.

About our third week, I had my first taste of success from the result of my work. Quite an ambitious part was given me, and I know it was not vanity when I felt I had done credit to myself. The stage manager was most kind in complimenting me, every one said nice things to me, and the flush of that first achievement is the happiest memory of my life. Miriam was quite as delighted over my success as I had been over hers, and the future indeed glowed rosily for us both.

"You're an awfully clever girl," Miss Dainty said to me one night that week, "and you *ought* to get on, but I ha' me doots, I *ha'* me doots."

I stared at her blankly.

"Why," I cried quite indignant, "how can you say that? I realize it is hard, hard work, but I'm willing to work."

"Yes," she answered, "I know you are, but you want to be sure it's the right man."

There wasn't any sense to such a queerly constructed sentence, and I told her it was perfectly irrelevant.

"There you are!" she exclaimed, "that's just why I have my doubts. Now I don't believe Miriam will let anything stand in *her* way, and, to my mind, she isn't one, two, three with you in talent. But you, young lady, will come bump up against a bunch of scruples, if you don't get that set mouth into a grin, and that serious 'Why? What? and Wherefore?' look out of those big eyes of yours."

I was silent, not entirely comprehending, and she went on:

"You see, when I say work the *right* man I mean the one who can advance you the quickest. It isn't always the managers although you have to be nice to them more or less too, but look out for the guy with the money, because he's the fellow the manager has to make use of, and if he's on *your* string you do the manipulating."

Miriam had just entered after a big scene on the stage and started to change her dress. I looked at her expecting to see a merry little wink which she generally gave me, when she knew I wasn't exactly approving of the conversation and which was always followed up, when we were alone, with "now try not to look so sour, Childy dear, folks don't mean half as much harm as you seem to credit them with; and, besides, it all comes under the head of experience, and when we get a company of our own we can pick our acquaintances." But at the end of this last remark of Dainty's, instead of the looked for wink, I saw only an expression of eagerness as she drank in every word.

"I'm giving our friend some advice," went on our visitor to dressing room No. 1. "You know by Stella Melloweye whom you were in the company with, weren't you? how silly it is to fall in love with actors. They never can do anything for you. Look at Sneak. He couldn't help me to a place in the chorus. Not that he would try very hard, but he couldn't. However," with a laugh and wink at Miriam, "it's convenient to be married sometimes. But you know Stella Melloweye is one of the cleverest girls in the business, and she could have been starring long ago, only she simply won't look at a man unless she's in love with him, no matter how much money he has."

I arose to hook Miriam's dress for her and caught sight of her flushed, smiling face in the glass. She was all hope and exuberance as usual and laughingly exclaimed:

"Oh, Dainty dear, you're a cynic; 'much sorrow hath made thee mad.'"

"Not me," answered Dainty as gaily; "I'm giving sound, straight tips. You're both young (this worldly woman herself was not more than twenty-five years old), and I'd like to see you get on and not go throwing your time away falling in love. It's a great big sell at the best. Make use of the men, but for heaven's sake don't let them make use of you."

"I'm very sure you look at this from a mercenary point of view," I observed; "surely merit is bound to win, ultimately, whether one makes use of any one or not."

"Like fun it will," returned this young cynic, daubing her cheek with my rouge rabbit foot. "Example: given two young women of equal beauty and talent; one with strict morals and virtuous instincts, the other with scruples a bit elastic: the Cerberus guarding the gates (in this instance) of Opportunity, a man whose watchword in life is lust and—puzzle picture; in five years find the 'Star.' You don't have to go to Algebra to do that sum."

Miriam laughed lightly at my long face and cried:

"Dainty, dear, Prudy is actually believing you, but you can't scare me; after four curtain calls on my big scene to-night I'm like the tiger that has tasted blood. *I'm* going to get on. And I'll prove to you that it can be done and done right too. Just watch me," and she flitted out at the stage manager's cry of "Last act!"

"She'll get on all right," muttered Dainty as the door closed. "She's got it in her."

"And she's clever," I maintained stoutly.

"Fairly so," reluctantly admitted this judge. "I've seen barrels of 'em cleverer, and you, nor any one else, ever heard of 'em. No one will ever hear of you," and she looked me clearly in the eye. I was getting rosy red from anger, and I hotly exclaimed:

"You have no right to infer that all women who succeed and make a name for themselves are unscrupulous in their morals. That's a scandalous assertion to make." I mentioned many names of successful actresses I had read of, and at each Dainty went into

shrieks of laughter and followed it up with tale after tale of each individual, her trials, her struggles, and how she attained her ultimate success; all of which I put down as rank gossip and most naturally refused to believe it.

When I told Miriam, she quite agreed with me and said that one of the burning shames of the profession was the small regard there was among actors for the reputations of their fellows.

"It's all jealousy," she said, "and, of course, in Dainty's case, she made an unfortunate marriage, and it has soured her. It's a shame, too, for she's a dear girl, and it must be awful to be a cynic at twenty-five."

I thought so too and was glad indeed that Miriam's mind was so much more healthy even if it did side a little too vigorously towards optimism.

I wish I could record that the entire short season was spent as pleasantly as even these gossipy moments in the dressing rooms, but our troubles began, slightly, our second week and grew apace with remarkable rapidity. Miriam had been laughingly warned that Everton Smitten (the actor who really secured us the engagement and who was leading man of the company) made it his habit to fall in love with his companion in art, the "leading lady." In fact, if such were not the case, his temper was exceedingly bad. But Miriam had known him casually for some time, and he had always been the most ordinary kind of friend, so that she felt quite secure with him in this position, and reasoned that they should do excellent work together.

But alas for the frailty of human nature! Once she was his sweetheart of fiction and impersonation, she became, to his imagination, his own particular property. That Miriam was not imbued with the same vision, made very little difference. It was real to him.

Here also was a type. I have met this same kind since. Not all actors, in fact I may say it is the minority, but a certain class of them are so impressionable that they cannot play a love scene with a woman without becoming really enamored of her. That is undoubtedly a part of human nature. The very impact of a woman's close presence is more than some natures can withstand. Such men I *pity* only, and I freely state I have seen some struggle gloriously against this very condition, only to yield eventually, even while most earnestly fighting against it. Naturally, in the latter case, they were assisted by the woman in question who, often herself unscrupulous and susceptible, was only too anxious for this sort of "flirtation" which came to her each season.

But Miriam was thoroughly ambitious and in earnest, and, while she liked Everton, she had no time, nor desire to fall in love with him. She bantered him at first, thinking it would pass over, and they could still be good friends, but he was not to be put off that way. From an attitude of slavish devotion, when he finally saw his passion was unrequited, he turned to a morose disagreeableness which made itself felt by every one in the company.

As Dainty put it, he became "very nasty." He would make the most sarcastic remarks about Miriam's work, or gowns, and go into a towering rage if she received more applause than he and demand of the stage manager that a rehearsal be called "to cut out superfluous business *some* people were unprofessional enough to put into their scenes."

Our saving grace was that Mr. Mollify, the stage manager, was a dear, good soul who read the real situation and who, while he did not dare antagonize the "leading man," had a tactful way of suggesting to Miriam, in his presence, that she eliminate such and such things from her part, and then quietly telling her, "on the side," not to mind, and just to be a bit careful, that's all.

But even tact and good nature availed nothing against this man's wounded vanity and childlike pettiness at being denied anything he happened to desire. That it was only a momentary attraction, born purely of existing conditions and associations, Miriam knew only too well.

"Why can't he be peaceful and sensible?" she would say after a particularly pettish outburst on Smitten's part. "He'll forget me in three days after we reach New York. Why can't he let me work in peace?"

That was not his policy. They say "hell knows no fury like a woman scorned," but I have seen exhibitions of men, who have not had things go just to suit their way of thinking, that would make a woman's manner of taking revenge seem childlike and bland.

What the outcome would have been had our season lasted its allotted ten weeks' time, I cannot say. As it was, it worked Miriam into a dreadfully nervous state. She was not by nature endowed with a superabundance of control, and this sort of treatment would have been wearing on any one. His sarcasm, insinuations and absolutely cruel remarks, sent her into the dressing room, on more than one occasion, in blinding tears.

The ladies of the company were inclined to sympathize with Miriam, but the men took no sides. Everton was treated with the same manner as was any other man who did not happen to be carrying on the small torture that he was. One day we saw an item in a paper that a New York leading woman had thrown down her part at a rehearsal, saying to the leading man, with whom she had been playing for some time, "I have stood your ignorance, insolence, and bad manners as long as I can," and walked out of the theatre. How we envied her that independence, which permitted her to take such a stand; and, as Miriam said, how literally did she hit the nail on the head in those few adjectives!

An appeal to the management only made matters worse, for they considered Everton a popular favorite with the ladies who attend performances, and flatly told Miriam that if she had a grievance against Mr. Smitten she must have done something to gain his ill will; which treatment might not have been so bad, although it seemed unjust, but that the man to whom

the complaint was made jested about it over the bar to the one against whom it was made, so that Miriam's next greeting from this now offended individual was:

"Lots of good tattle tales get when they run with their baby stories to people." Then imitating a naughty child, "Ya-ya, I'll tell mamma on you, you mean thing," this in the presence of every one in the company and incidentally while the tears silently rolled down Miriam's cheeks, but with no rebuke from any one to the offender.

Never, in the twenty years of my experience in the theatrical profession (covering intimate association with many various companies from the third rate to the very highest), never, have I seen a man defend a woman who was being actually abused by tongue and manner by another man in some authority. I have seen husbands stand calmly by and hear all sorts of vituperation heaped upon their wives by stage managers or men who felt they had the power to do so, with never a word of protest, and, if questioned on the subject, the answer was that "managers object to engaging married couples because if one has a quarrel the other takes sides, and both eventually have to leave"; so, in order to hold their engagements, they must keep silence as well.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO THE RIALTO.

In spite of our manager's affirmation as to the popularity of our manly (?) leading man, our business was anything but flourishing, and after the third week rumors dire and dreary floated about our heads.

"What do you think?" exclaimed Dainty, one evening, "I heard one of the boys say to-day that it looked as if it was all up with the season as the backer is getting cold feet, losing so much money, without having one of us girls make up to him, so he doesn't think he's really getting that money's worth. A good loser would go on and finish out the ten weeks if it took every cent he had, but I suppose old Cheap-sides (the manager) fed him up on this being a great chance 'to get next to an actress' to get his money, and now he's sore. Gee! I wish I'd known it sooner, but I saw he was making a play for baby eyes here, and I gave her such good advice too; but, bless you, she never even saw him;" and she went off into her usual boisterous laughter.

If she had referred to me in her peculiar appellation I am sure I never did. I was too busy with my work to "see" any one, and I must say this man had only

been friendly and courteous. When I made some such defense for him, Dainty only threw back her pretty head and exclaimed:

"Child alive! you don't suppose he's going to break the ice and get himself into trouble, do you? He may be a married man, and if he spoke first you'd have the innings to go and tell wifie, if you didn't happen to kitten."

She was always talking in this vein, and I had come now to pay very little attention to her; so she went on:

"Golly, I haven't saved a cent all season, and I'm in debt for clothes on this job. Oh Lord! if we close now with nothing to do all summer, you'll see me going around in cabs and things in New York, with 'em with noses like this," and she circled a large hook in the air with her pretty finger.

Of course, we laughed at her, and Miriam said:

"You ought not to worry, Sneak has been at work all winter at a good salary."

"Yes," observed Dainty, "which he has spent long ago, or if not 'divil's the cint he'll ge ta me,' (rashly mixing her Irish and Scotch). Not him! Why when we were in vaudeville, doing a sketch, he gave me a salary and by golly, I had to pay my own expenses even to half the rent of our room in hotels. Fine for the lillies!"

She said everything so good naturedly and had such pretty dimples that one never felt like expending any sympathy on her. And yet hers was really a

domestic tragedy, for she loved Sneak devotedly and he probably had a kind of regard for her, but still did not consider it incumbent upon him to contribute to her wants in any degree. She was a bread winner the same as he, capable of commanding a fair salary, and why should she not take care of herself?

Poor Dainty! one could not help liking her. Even if she was a cynic she was a most good natured one, and if she had any great heart sorrows she kept them to herself.

But now we had to look at our own account, and to our horror, in the secret of our own rooms, we found we, too, were terribly in debt, not only to the management, which meant possibly no salary coming to us if the crash came soon, but also to various tradespeople in the city in which we were playing.

"Oh!" cried Miriam, when we had finished making up our accounts for the first time, "we really ought to have kept track better. What shall we do?"

"Well," I observed trying to be consoling, "we simply had to have the gowns."

"Yes, I know," she acquiesced dubiously, "but now we have them, and we've only worked three weeks, and we were promised ten."

"I suppose we must count it as profit and loss," I said, although I felt even bluer than I dared show, "and, besides, we can use the gowns again."

"May be," she returned, "it depends on what kind of engagements we get. Oh, it's unfair!" and she arose and paced up and down the room.

My exuberant Miriam, I knew she must be in distress to take it so to heart. After all it was only one of those obstacles which we were to consider nil in our climbing. Her mouth was drawn and hard, and her gray eyes lusterless, and when I put my arms around her in sympathy those beautiful Irish orbs filled with tears.

"I haven't spoken of it," she said, trying to smile, "but we, our folks I mean, are dreadfully poor. Mamma does a little something at sewing out by the day, but I have a sister who is an invalid and mamma cannot always leave her. I've been away four years now, and have been able to send them scarcely anything, and when I went with 'father's' company this season I had so hoped this summer I could give them an outing and—" she broke down and sobbed on my shoulder. My light hearted Miriam! But even the most optimistic of us have our moments when the sun seems to refuse to shine.

There was, of course, but one thing to be done, if the crash came, and that was to get out of debt to the merchants in the city and then see about getting through the summer, for another engagement that season was out of the question. If we closed the next week, far from getting any salary, Miriam would be behind with the management and so unable to satisfy the trades people. My salary would just about come out even, and I had sundry bills to meet. Like all good Thespians, however, we put off the actual arranging to do anything until the crash came, if it

did come, and, true fellows of the "fiat improvident," we hoped against hope that business would pick up, and eagerly would we ask of one another:

"How is the house to-night?" and as hopefully be answered:

"Oh, not so bad, I've seen worse," each one striving to convince himself, or as we say "jolly himself along."

Sometimes peeping eagerly through the hole in the curtain, we would count the unsuspecting holders of seat coupons and make all sorts of hypnotic signs to lure the public theatre-ward.

Perhaps it is only the nature of the hopeful-devil-may-care which could stand a strain like that. Coming at the end of an already broken season, to most of us, with a long hot summer to be spent in seeking work for the next year, to face a situation like this is enough to make a strong man tremble, especially if there is a family to consider. Serious minded, deliberating men would shrink from such a condition, which no one can say will not come upon the best of us to-morrow. But your average actor spends his money as he gets it, thinking of such a break as this as a possibility, but hardly a probability, and when it finally does creep upon him, he almost smilingly accepts it; light heartedly borrowing his way through to another season where he begins again to earn and spend as before, with as small thought, usually, for the responsibilities of last summer's debts as for the next summer's living. Possibly it is only this kind of

temperament which could stand the contingency and tremendous uncertainty of the *modus operandi* of this very precarious profession; and as nature generally evens things up rather well, it is in this field she seems to put her irresponsible and happy-go-lucky men and women.

The crash came at the end of the fourth week, and we were informed that the backer would take us to New York, but that the last week's salary would have to be a "promise to pay" at some dim, uncertain future date. What could we do? Miriam had drawn her salary so far in advance that she was really ahead of the others, even if it had nearly all gone for wardrobe with which to earn it, but the rest of us were losers. The backer could hardly be blamed, for he had spent a considerable sum, struggling against bad business, and there were no prospects of its ever being any better; and "some backers skip out," I was told, "and do not even take you back to New York."

Miriam was over one hundred dollars in debt and with nothing to live on during the summer. After much thinking and lying awake at night, she finally decided that she knew of a man she could borrow the money from, giving a note on her next season's salary as security. Please put this statement away in a corner of your brain and remember it, and if you see no element of danger in it now just wait until my story is finished.

I asked her if this man was a relative, and she said no; she did not even know him very well. He had

been a business friend of her father's, but had rather dropped him when he met with his reverses and probably would not know that he was dead. Still, this man had gone way up in the business world and had lots of money now; and she was desperate. I doubted if he would consider her note a good business proposition, especially as her next season was a matter of great uncertainty, but she felt that she could "talk him into it," if she saw him, and when I realized that she would have to go to New York before she could even settle with her creditors where we were, and that that would mean leaving her trunk as security, I did the only thing possible for a friend to do—wrote to my relative who had thus far financed me in my endeavors to serve ambition and stated that "it being my first season naturally it had not turned out to as great financial advantage as I might have hoped, and I would be compelled to remain in New York during the summer, or at least until I settled something for next season, and, in short, I needed considerable more money."

Before our last performance I received a reply. My letter had been exactly what this dear, New England prophet expected. One season, he had given a girl of my character and up bringing, to see the folly of the whole affair and to be thoroughly "cured," but as I wrote of another season he saw that he had wrongly judged my intuition and must set me down with the other forty-seven thousand kinds of brainless harum-scarums who cannot see an inch before their noses, and

leave me to a fate I seemed to have found attractive. He enclosed a draft for two hundred dollars, which, I very well knew, was spared with difficulty, and I was definitely to understand it was *the last*, as I must henceforth make my own way.

I knew, indeed, the many little sacrifices there would be in the next year for him to give me so much of his small income. He had been a good, kind, and gentle guardian, but what I considered prosaic and of somewhat narrow mind. He based his opinion of worldly things purely on hearsay and that, to me, always seemed unjust, unfair, especially as the opinion thus formed was of the darkest and most unworthy aspect. So I had talked and reasoned with him and finally he had consented to let me see for myself and convince him that art, at least, was true and beautiful. My first experience had been a disappointment, it was true, and had given him first honors, but I was only at the bottom rung of a huge, twisting, elusive ladder, almost overwhelming in its complexity, and yet I still felt it was worthy the ascending. Nevertheless, true to his narrow mental grasp and, also because he had firmly convinced himself that my first taste would be so bitter it would drive me back defeated, he now stubbornly refused me wider observation and curtly bade me go my way alone. Kind, loving, tender as he had been in my youth, I knew, too, the puritanical strain of iron will back of that staunch character, and that when he said I need expect no more of him it was

inexorable and that his home, in deed and truth, was mine no longer.

Youth, however, takes these matters lightly, and I felt quite capable of taking care of myself, especially with the two hundred dollar draft to make me feel easy and to help my friend who was in greater straits than I. We managed to pay Miriam's indebtedness and to land in New York City with a clear one hundred dollars, and I asked her not to borrow, unless it should become absolutely necessary. She promised, and we made plans to settle ourselves where the expense would be lightest and prepare to face the long hot summer in a way that would make the one hundred dollars go its farthest.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISSERTATION ON DRESS.

A hotel even with shaft rooms, such as we before occupied, was out of the question now, so we decided to look for a room where we could prepare some of our meals and that way minimize expenses. But rooms fitted for light housekeeping were in such miserable neighborhoods that our artistic and sensitive souls revolted at them. Besides, we belonged to a profession, not a trade, and we had both found it made considerable difference, as to our treatment, what kind of an address we gave to the agents.

We finally decided on a room (for we could afford but one) which, while it was not in a strictly first-class district, at least was in a clean one, and as it had a side gas jet near the bureau, under cover of night we smuggled in a small gas stove, a coffee pot, and a bucket, determined, at least, to get our breakfasts of coffee, rolls, and fruit and save the restaurant price on them. It was an easy matter to get the rolls and some berries when we were out to supper or rather dinner (we had but two meals a day), and if the landlady ever scented the aroma of our coffee in the hall, she was kindly disposed enough not to speak of it, and we were very careful not to leave the room with any traces of our "crime" about.

Is there a place on earth hotter, more enervating, and soul-trying than New York City in summer? If there is I do not wish to go to it. What we suffered those months of June, July, and August I dislike to remember. We undoubtedly would have been able to live even more inexpensively in a smaller, cooler town, or in the country, but we feared in going away we might miss the very opportunity we were longing for; for it is always at some time during one of these months that engagements are made for the ensuing season.

The one hundred dollars slowly dwindled away, strive as we would to stay its persistent flight, and we soon saw it would be quite insufficient to take us to the beginning of the working year. Miriam began to talk of her father's business acquaintance; but I asked her once more to wait. I felt a repugnance about her taking such a step I could hardly express, or explain to myself. Then there was the hope that if we got an engagement the manager would advance us something to live on until the season should begin.

Fatal hope! I remember that summer of applying to an author-manager for a part in a new play he was to produce that year, and being interviewed by his wife.

"The part isn't a very long one," she said when I mentioned the name of the character for which I had been sent by an agent, to be considered, "but it is a very dressy one. We would expect you to spend considerable on the gowns."

I explained that I had some wardrobe, which I only recently purchased in my spring engagement.

This would not do at all, I was hurriedly informed. The gowns must be absolutely new and of certain design and color. Yet I was hopeful. This was the nearest I had been to an engagement that summer, all my other "nibbles" having been cut short with "not settling anything until August," or, "nothing open at all for next season," when I had been purposely sent, with numerous others, in response to a "call" from these very people. That this interview should have reached the discussion of the gowns for the part seemed almost too good to be true, although I was forced to admit I was only being "looked over" by the wife of the person in power, and that I would, of course, have to go through it all again with him.

"About how much would the gowns cost?" I asked from my rising spirits.

"Well, there are four acts in which this character appears," she said, "and it will require a different gown for each act. I'm very particular about those things, and I have designed all the ladies' gowns so there will be no clashing of colors. Let me see, 'Milly,' " and she selected some elaborate plates from a large book on the center table. "The first is a carriage dress in blue, hat, shoes, and gloves to match. Madame Retz, my modisté, has given me estimates. I should expect her to make them, of course, so that I can personally superintend them; an evening gown of yellow embroidered chiffon over yellow taffeta

silk, shoes and fan to match; a white lace summer gown and white hat, with pink roses and a long white ostrich feather, shoes and gloves to match; and a house gown or negligée of white crepe de chiné and cluny lace. About five hundred dollars ought to do it with the shoes and gloves."

My heart was beating fiercely at the idea of wearing all these pretty things, tempting to any feminine mind, but the sordid business proposition must be met. The salary for the part was thirty-five dollars a week, and on a season of thirty weeks I would receive in all one thousand and fifty dollars. Practically half of it would be spent in gowns with which to earn it.

"Would Mr. Writeplays be willing to advance the money and take it out of my salary?" I asked stammeringly, a great lump in my throat and my tongue nearly sticking to the roof of my mouth.

The lady gave me a freezing look and shut her book of designs with a clink.

"Most certainly not," she snapped, "you must think Mr. Writeplays a multi-millionaire. Suppose you were not satisfactory in the part, after a few weeks where would his money be? Locked up in your gowns."

"But I haven't that amount of money to invest at present," I said, having visions of part, gowns, and engagement vanishing into thin air.

"Well, that is your look-out," she observed curtly. "We can get a hundred girls who will spend that amount and what is more beginners, like you, would

be glad to *pay* Mr. Writeplays for the privilege of being in such a production."

The play was untried. It might fail after a few weeks, and where would *my* five hundred dollars be? Locked up in some gowns which no doubt would not suit my next manager at all, nor any other part I might be called upon to play. However, I did not wish to antagonize; so kept this line of argument to myself. Yet how often in the years which followed have I seen the situation develop in just that way; women spending thousands of dollars on gowns for productions which gave them a promise of a season's work, but the fulfillment of only a few weeks' salary, out of which they must live and pay for this finery besides. The result was inevitable debt, sometimes deep and direful.

The author's wife was talking, however, and I must not miss her words of wisdom.

"My dear child," she said patronizingly, "take this piece of advice from one who has been in the business many years (she had been an actress before she married Mr. Writeplays) "*dress*, whatever else you do, *dress*. It is the one thing that counts with managers. Get the money some way, a manager will never ask you, nor does he care, how; all he wants to know is that you do dress and dress *swell*," and the look she swept over me convinced me that she considered my plain tailor-made walking dress one decidedly unfit in which to pay a visit to a manager.

I had realized this myself on more than one occasion, yet to wear the ruffles and rustling furbelows which passed me up and down the stairs leading to agents' and managers' offices, made my "æsthetic soul" revolt. To say these women were *well* dressed, is ludicrous; expensively dressed they undoubtedly were yet with absolutely no regard for taste, good sense, nor, above all, for the eternal fitness of things. But these women are on show, especially in seeking employment, and they evidently feel that they must exhibit their charms to the best advantage a first glance may obtain.

It is quite the same with an actor. He, too, is on show even in the day time on Broadway. Nearly any actor will tell you the story of the leading man who, receiving a salary of some sixty dollars a week, dressed like a western millionaire and was always hopelessly in debt. When attempting to borrow from a much used source, one time, the weary lender of small bills remarked that the borrower was "a pretty swell dresser for a man of his salary," and at that instant the dean of the profession happened to pass in all his plain and almost sloven glory. "There," cried the man who was to lend the money, "there is a man who makes *money*, not a salary, and look at his clothes. You are dressed like a king compared to him."

"By Jove! I have to be," returned the borrower, "my engagements depend upon it. *He* can afford to dress as suits himself. If I looked like that I'd

never sign another contract the longest day I lived." And he was quite right.

The contention of the manager is that his actors shall look prosperous. Whether they are or not makes no difference. It is the "outward seeming," alone, which counts.

"Gee! but he (or she) looks like ready money" is, to us, the most delightful thing that can be said of us. As my adviser of that day had remarked: "*It makes no difference where one gets the money; one must dress! dress! dress!*"

Needless to say, I did not get the part of "Milly" in the new play, and moreover I went home with a weakening faith in the possibility of an advance from a manager to finish out our living expenses for the summer. Miriam, whose experience covered four years more than mine, evidently knew from trials that this was most difficult of consummation, for when I dragged my sorely disappointed and decidedly sweltering self up our stairs, I found her reveling in the cool flimsiness of a kimona and a jubilant smile illuminating her piquant face.

"Disappointed again, childie?" she asked as she caught sight of my woe begone expression. "Never mind, cheer up. I've some good news any way. Look!" and she shook a fifty dollar bill before my astonished eyes.

"Miriam," I gasped, sinking into a chair, "where did it come from?"

"Why, where it should have come from weeks ago," she coolly remarked. "You kept me back, you dear little Prudy, but I felt all the time it would be all right. I went to see Mr. Gotrox, while you were up at Writeplays', and told him our difficulties, and he was perfectly lovely. He remembered papa well and became quite reminiscent about their early days. He gave me this as a loan, of course, and said if we needed more to let him know. And it was most lucky I went to-day as he sails for Europe the end of the week to get out of this heat; and, childie, lift up thy drooping head; we are going to have the monotony of this awful existence broken a bit. He invited me to dinner to-morrow at Del's, and when I told him about you he said, 'Oh, both of you, of course.' Now we will look our prettiest and go and imagine the world is ours just for once, eh?"

I nodded approval. The prospect looked inviting, especially as we had been dining in the little off street lunch and coffee houses. When Miriam saw there was no dissenting voice, she went on with a bit of hurt disapproval in her tone.

"I think you made a great mistake, dear, to shut yourself off so exclusively. (I had positively protested against receiving any actor acquaintance in our room.) People are not all bad. You seem to think they are waiting in corners and alleyways to eat you up."

"No, I don't Miriam," I said, "but there is such a thing as propriety."

"Not to any great extent when you are out in the world, trying to make your own way," she returned firmly. "There are lots of little prides we have to put in our pockets."

I was too footsore and weary to argue the case, and, after all, might she not have been right? She had fifty dollars to back up her argument, and I had come home empty handed, without even a prospect, only a brain full of advice, as to one of the essentials that lures engagements, *dress*.

CHAPTER X.

WE DINE WITH A MILLIONAIRE.

The dinner next evening became an absorbing thing. The prospect of a "square meal" alone was enough to fill one with enthusiasm, even in such heat, but a really and truly dinner at fashionable Delmonico's, where swelldom congregates, was quite adequate to turn the heads of two isolated and mournful young persons.

After much persuasion, I yielded to Miriam's entreaties and consented to wear one of my stage gowns; the least conspicuous one I could select aside from cotton country dresses. Miriam was in the seventh heaven of delight. The most elaborate white lace she possessed was whipped into shape. Big and cottony of pattern it was, for it had been purchased with the idea that distance would lend enchantment to its beauty, but this entered not into Miriam's sense of reason. We must look "swell," was the only thought, and, with a leghorn hat crushed beneath the weight of a huge bunch of red roses, my pretty chum did look picturesque, which was probably her definition of "swell" at that time. As a great deal of walking had reduced our shoes to gray indigence, and warm weather our gloves to stiffened

masses of kid, incidentally quite a portion of that much needed fifty dollars was expended in making ourselves presentable for the great and glorious occasion.

For once we looked quite like the other members of our fraternity as we emerged from our little hall bedroom just off Seventh Avenue into the six o'clock light of a summer's day, and with beating, happy hearts (or at least one happy heart, I felt as if I wished myself anywhere except going to a big dinner; it seemed such a sham and pretense when we were really so poor) we boarded a car which was to take us to Broadway and Twenty-sixth Street from whence we should walk to Fifth Avenue as Delmonico's was then at that point. Miriam explained that she had arranged to meet Mr. Gotrox there as she did not care to tell him where we lived. We had to wait nearly an hour, but it was a new experience to me to see the showy throng that surged past us even on that hot July night.

I knew that at that time "society" was out of town and that we were looking at that half world which usurps its place when it seeks cooler shades. Here "frau-frauded" by us women beautiful and women painted, women young and women bold, but all with the look of the "bloom brushed from the peach," the "gay" expression born of pleasure seeking. All were gowned! gowned! gowned! Such lace and silk and rustle and sparkle and glitter! My eyes grew weary, and I found I was vaguely asking myself if this then,

was the end and aim of life; to dress. It struck me that the sight of a befeathered cannibal maid might have relieved this millinery monotony just for a moment. Then I wondered if all that exhibition of the modisté's art compensated these women for the heartache and all that seemed to sit behind those set grins, those lines of unsatisfied, discontent pictured on almost every face that passed us.

Yet it seems life is only what we see in it as individuals. - Miriam was drinking in the smallest detail of every gown; I only the faces and, I realize it now, the minds that lay back of them, and they all surged and swayed with what appeared to me an intense restlessness, still seeking for a happiness they fain would have one think they had already attained when they put on the glitter and show.

Mr. Gotrox arrived at seven o'clock with numerous apologies that "the madame" had made an engagement for him and he found great difficulty in breaking it. "The madame," I gathered later, was Mrs. Gotrox. He had a wife, then. He was an old business acquaintance of Miriam's father; he knew she was alone in New York City and struggling to make her way in the world, yet he had not offered to take her to Mrs. Gotrox nor even to introduce her to that lady. I felt a lump come into my throat as I thought of this slight to so dear a girl as my chum, but remembering that she had said there were many little prides we must put in our pockets, I excused it on the ground that probably the lady in question was very austere

and snobbish, and would not brook meeting working girls, and if this gentleman was to befriend his old acquaintance's daughter it must be more or less surreptitiously done.

I rather grew to like him as dinner progressed. He was a really good looking man, about fifty years old, and in manner and bearing a thorough man of the world. He put us at our ease immediately (me especially) by telling us we looked rather too lovely to bear out Miriam's tale of hardship, as she had given it to him the day before. Miriam laughingly told him how we had made use of our "tools of trade," and he insisted that they were very becoming; that he would like to have seen us both in whatever characters we had worn them. In fact we learned he was an ardent theatre goer and knew a great many theatrical people. He mentioned names of the big men of the managerial world as his very good and intimate friends.

Miriam's eyes blazed, and her cheeks went rosy with the ambition which I knew fairly burned within her. How she talked of her hopes and aspirations and the hard, hard struggle it was just to "get ever so wee bit of a chance"; that for four years she had been working and now was just where she had started first; still seeking a good engagement. She did look lovely as she talked, those gray eyes sparkling as only Irish eyes can, it seems, and that cupid's bow mouth sweetly quivering and rosy red with excitement.

I did not wonder at our host's admiring glances at her and encouraging nods of his head that she might continue.

"Now, my dear child," he said soothingly, "the profession you have chosen is the same as any other business. There are hundreds in the same box as yourself. Managers are bothered to death with ambitious girls like you and your little friend here; some talented, some otherwise. Why, it would take one man's entire time to interview all the applicants, let alone giving each a trial to test her capabilities. There is only one way to do the trick," with a smile at the expression, "and that is to use overwhelming influence."

"Ah, yes," cried Miriam, "how well we already know that, don't we, Prudy?"

I could only sigh that we did indeed. It had seemed a foolish thing for him to say anyway.

"Now, my dear" he went on in a fatherly way, "I will be most happy to give you letters to two or three of my friends and will see if something can be done for you."

It might have been only a trifling common place sort of speech, but it sounded as if he had suddenly swung open the gates of Paradise and gently bade us enter.

"Oh!" I heard Miriam breathe, "Oh!" and then she went on enthusiastically, "I would be willing to begin in a good company way down at the foot of the ladder, because I would want to come up to the top purely

on my own merit. It wouldn't be worth having if I didn't know I had won it through worth;" a most commendable statement, yet I was turning over in my mind just then that this "beginning at the bottom of the ladder in a good company," was what the summer's sweltering in New York had done to her resolution "never to accept another position for any line except leads."

Our host was smiling on her and assuring her of his firm belief that she would achieve her success, eventually, through her talents, but that in the meantime a little "boost" could not possibly do her any harm.

The dinner from this time on was as an Elysian feast with the gods. We hardly seemed to be partaking of anything material. We were on the clouds, floating in air or, more blissfully still, in the ether. We had found the long sought although unexpressedly hoped-for friend with "influence." How I condemned myself that I had kept Miriam from making herself known to him before, but it was not too late, as all the engagements had not yet been made. I say we had found a friend, for I knew well that if Miriam obtained an opportunity, she would soon make a place for me. But our host of this evening failed to show whether he cared if I ever obtained an engagement. However, I was as delighted for my friend as if I had no ambition myself, for she had been struggling longer than I and she had greater responsibilities.

When we at last moved to go home we had all lived a wonderful life for Miriam, and she was at that moment in our "castles in the air" the great particular "star" not only of America but also of all Europe. We were laughing and happy in our day dream, and Miriam looked a radiant young queen in her enthusiasm and high spirits. As we turned to leave the brilliant room, chatting, almost noisily, in our exuberance of anticipation, my eyes rested on Dainty seated at a table not far from ours. My happy impulse was to rush to her and greet her with a glad cry, but she was looking fixedly at her escort and I knew instinctively she was aware of our presence, but did not wish us to notice hers.

"If the season closes now you will see me running about in cabs and things with 'em with noses like that." The words, the hook sweep of the arm, all came back to me in a flash. He had one, just such a nose as she had drawn in the air. A little repulsive looking man was leering and smoking in her face, and she was grinning back at him. But I knew the thoughts behind *that* grin as surely as I knew my own.

We were driven home in a cab. No keeping our humble abode a secret now, but a whizz through the streets of New York in our hired brougham meant nothing to me then. I was haunted by Dainty's face. Where was Sneak? Was it possible a man could allow his wife to keep such company simply because her season had been disastrous while his had been very successful? They had not separated, I

knew. He might possibly be in New York now, ostensibly living with her, but permitting her to get her "summer's keep" as best she could. That it pleased her to give her time to such a specimen of humanity, I knew only too well was not the truth. It was a matter of money, pure and simple, for she had made no bones of saying so.

I felt heartsick and faint over it, for I liked Dainty," and the thought that she was suffering hurt me even more than did the idea of her lack of morals. Like so many others of her class, the latter, I knew, never entered her consciousness as a factor in her life and could not possibly govern her actions. It was merely a blind necessity that she must live from season to season, anyway, anyhow, which she was obeying.

More recently I have heard an argument which goes even further than excusing such conduct on the grounds of necessity. This latter reason was in the case of a girl who was excused and sympathized with because she "simply must have luxuries. Why, they are a part of her being; she just can't live without them." And that idea is this girl's firm conviction.

I did not heed the conversation of our host and Miriam, and I said a very absent minded "good-night," I know, at the door. Miriam turned to me when we entered our room with:

"You were most impolite, Prudy," but I stopped her, just being able to murmur:

"Did you see Dainty?" and burst out crying as if my heart would break.

Dear, big hearted Miriam. She had been so interested in her new found friend that she had not seen our old one at all, and when I sobbingly told her how I had caught sight of her and the kind of person she was with, she mingled her sympathy with mine; for we were both more than fond of our erst-while companion in distress.

"Well, childy," Miriam began to reason, "we ought not take other people's lives so much to heart. It's Dainty's own doings, you know, and I'm sure she knows better, and she could get along, I've no doubt, some way, if she only thought so."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEQUEL TO THE DINNER.

Miriam soon turned the channel of thought toward ourselves and then poured out to me her plans. She was to go on the morrow to Mr. Gotrox's office and get some letters of introduction to the big managers, and as soon as she "landed an engagement" she was to "trot me out," if possible, for the same company, if not, it was really better that we each get something good and meet when we could on the road. We would always, *always*, be undying friends. Of course, I told her to try all she could for herself as she was the older, both in years and professionally, and it was due to her more than to me. I could afford to go on struggling for awhile.

The next day I helped her look her prettiest, and she sailed forth, in spite of the heat, to claim the much coveted letters. As she did not return at lunch time I took my little "smack" alone and then made the rounds of the agencies. Things were looking brighter, as there were several road managers in town, and Broadway teemed with color and flutter as the merry little actresses (we are all jubilant when we meet one another on Broadway) rustled from one office to the other, some having come in from near summer resorts,

some from their hiding places in out of the way furnished rooms or boarding houses, and others (envied class) driving up in cabs at the call of the "big managers."

Nothing came my way. I was patted on the back by my one-hundred-dollar-agent friend, but while I saw other girls interviewed by managers in that office, I was still told there was nothing in my line.

Miriam did not return until nearly five o'clock, and though she was almost beside herself with success, she acted hysterically nervous. She had lunched with Mr. Gotrox, and he had given her the letters and then put her in a cab and sent her to a great and representative office. She had been beautifully received by one of the managers himself, and on the morrow she was to meet one of their prominent stars with a view to entering his company.

"I think Mr. Gotrox must be financially interested in the firm," she continued, "for they were awfully 'bowy' and 'scrapy' to me."

My spirits rose. I was glad for her sake, and glad to know that in a great city like this, there was so kindly a gentleman of ample means to stretch forth his hand to a deserving, ambitious girl.

The interview with the star was very satisfactory, and Miriam came home with a contract. She was to play rather an important part, what is termed "Juvenile," and her salary was to be fifty dollars a week; a small fortune to either of us then. But she did not seem to jump for joy, as I imagined she would

under such momentous circumstances. Instead she was fussy and almost irritable. She insisted in taking me for a ride up Riverside and "blew us to a supper," as she expressed it, at the Casino. We did not get back to our stuffy little room until very late, and when we did arrive there was a telegram awaiting Miriam. She trembled violently as she tore open the envelope, and as it fluttered to the table after she had read it, it seemed as if pent up nerves broke loose, as a terror had apparently slipped from her, and she gave way to the hysterical fit of weeping she had indulged in on the night of our first meeting.

In vain I tried to comfort her. She told me between sobs to let her cry it out; that she would tell me all about it later. I asked if I might read the telegram and she said, "Yes."

It ran: "Why have you broken faith? I can mar as well as make. Give satisfactory explanation. I sail alone. Same address, Paris."

No name was signed, and though I was puzzled I knew it was from Mr. Gotrox, as he had intended sailing for Europe that week. I asked nothing further, and when she had "cried it out," Miriam very bravely told me all about it and not without a touch of pride; for, after all was said, she really felt in her innermost heart that she had acted throughout with the greatest diplomacy.

"Childie," she began with her sweetest, most endearing air, "really your little friend Miriam isn't such a blockhead as you may think, and you'll realize it when

you see the wonderful way she managed this affair, even if she did get a bit scary and nervous towards the last, for fear the final slip out might not have been as easy as it has just proved. You see, when I went to lunch with the gentleman, and to get the letters of introduction, instead of taking me to a restaurant he very coolly drove me to a dear and gorgeous apartment which I very well knew wasn't where "the madame" resided. I didn't think much of it at the time since it was down town, and I supposed, perhaps, he did not care to have his business associates see him lunching with a young girl, and, moreover, I felt no alarm as he had known my father. But, bless you, if, between the soup and fish, he didn't proceed to try to make love to me. Now don't get so red in the face, dear, for of course you would have demanded that he instantly return you to 'that dear lodging house just off Seventh Avenue,' and that would have been the end of your engagement with a good company. I simply 'jollied' the old fellow a little, and then he laid out his plan. I was to sign with the Bigbunch firm for any good part they would give me, and when he sailed for Europe on Saturday, I was to go with him. He would put 'the madame' off, so that she would go on the steamer on which he had already engaged passage, and he would plead business which would detain him in New York a week longer and go instead on another steamer with my humble, but beautiful self. We would have a couple of weeks in Paris before he would join 'Madame' in London. I could get my fine

Parisian gowns and be back here for rehearsals. Now, Prudikin, you can do a lot in this world by jollyng and pretending, and I said I would think it over, that of course it was a great surprise to me, since he must know I was a thoroughly good girl and nothing like this had ever entered my life; but I realized I owed him a great deal and as he didn't seem to care whether I considered myself good or not, and he did consider me his debtor, he evidently concluded my 'sparring for time' was only pretended innocence and that eventually his plan would be carried out. He gave me the letters and let me go on the promise that I would dine with him after I saw the members of the firm of Bigbunch. I sent a telegram reneging on the dinner on the plea that I was suffering with a terrible headache, but had made up my mind to take the ocean voyage. A letter full of all sorts of mushy gush came by a messenger boy while you were away, and then I saw Idolized, the star. He interviewed me only a few minutes, but told Bigbunch I would do nicely for the juvenile part in his new play. Bigbunch then took me in hand and said the salary would just about pay my hotel expenses and sleepers, because they were very particular that the members of their companies went to the best hotels and made a good showing on the road, for it meant business to the first-class companies to show an air of prosperity, but, of course, I undoubtedly would gown the part well as Mr. Gotrox assured them I could be counted on to do that. If you are blushing, you should have seen my

face, as I wondered if he had told them, also, my gowns were to be purchased abroad. But I was game. I wanted that contract; so I fluttered: 'Oh, yes, that will be all right,' and he signed my piece of paper, and I signed his. Then I was so afraid a cab would come to take me to that steamer, that I kept you out all day in the heat until I was sure Gotrox had gone. I knew he would sail, for he was to go abroad alone, and meet me, after the steamer had sailed, as if by accident. This is his telegram of rage:

" 'Outwitted ah! ah! by a snip of a girl. Gad zooks! Pish, tush!' Oh! Oh! Girlie, it's as good as a novel. 'The diplomatic actress: or who fooled old Gotrox?' " and she struck an attitude of stage villain that at any other time would have sent me into peals of laughter.

But I did not laugh then. It was too revolting. A man old enough to be her father! A man who had a family and was once a friend of her father to try cold bloodedly to buy a couple of weeks' illicit association by promising to get her a few gowns and giving her an opportunity to earn a salary for a few months to come. A salary, incidentally, which she was expected to spend in living while she was earning it, without providing for the summer season which was sure to come round next year. That she had used stratagem and fooled the old reprobate, made him none the less contemptible nor the whole affair less nauseous.

I would not dwell upon it, but timidly asked her what she intended to do about the gowns in question,

since the management very evidently expected her "friend" to purchase them. "Make a bluff," she said. "I have gowns which are plenty good enough, and they need never know the difference."

"But if they design them and expect you to go to a certain dressmaker as Mr. Writeplay's wife did, what then?" I asked.

"Trust to luck," she returned gaily; "I think Mr. Idolized will stand by me if it comes to a showdown. He seemed to like me, and I'll make a clean breast of it to him before I'll lose the engagement."

"But this man says in his telegram that he 'can mar as well as make,' " suggested I. "Suppose he cables Bigbunch not to consider you after all."

"Too late," and she triumphantly waved her contract at me; "besides, silly Billy, you don't suppose he is going to have those men think he got left, do you?"

We both decided that Miriam stood on much too thin ice with her managers to venture to make room for me, and that it was best for me still to try in other channels.

"You see, dearie," Miriam said, "if I can just put in one season with these people and 'make good' I will be in a position to introduce you, and another season in an inferior company won't do you any harm. I've been at it four years, you know, dear, and you only one."

I quite agreed with her as I would not have stood in the way of her advancement for the world. And

we were both beginning to realize that friendship, however close, should not interfere with business. It had been, after all, a foolish girl notion that we should be in the same company, and born, naturally, of the desire for congenial companionship. So I still made my rounds of the agents, but by the time Miriam's rehearsals were called, I as yet had my season to settle. However, the pungency of my disappointment was softened by my interest in Miriam and her reports of rehearsals and the company which was comprised of the much sought and coveted "better class."

Mr. Idolized "was a terror," as Miriam put it, to most of the company, but was very kind to her. After three rehearsals I was informed by my chum that the "leading woman" was evidently his lady love, but he was brutally cruel to her for all that.

"Of course she can't act for a cent," Miriam explained, "but he needn't tell her so before everyone and make her cry."

"If she can't act what reason has she to be leading lady of a first-class company?" I asked with not nearly as much indignation as I felt.

"Childie, dear," cried Miriam, "didn't I tell you she was his bestest own?"

"Is that any excuse for inflicting the public with her?" I asked again.

"Oh, bother the public," returned sage Miriam Merriworld, "it isn't any infliction as far as the public is concerned. Bigbunch's press agent says

she's great, and the public believes it. I am going to try and get the understudy of her part, and if she's ever ill, I'll just show them how it ought to be played."

I ventured a ghastly joke. "Perhaps you will have to understudy the 'bestest own' side of it too, before he will let you have the chance."

Miriam gave me a queer, quizzical look from the corners of her beautiful eyes and laughed merrily.

"I shouldn't wonder," she jested, and I changed the subject.

We sewed and fixed at the already (to us) costly wardrobe of last season and managed to get three very pretty gowns out for the part Miriam was to play. And oh! how hot it was that August month. Yet we were happy in the thought of starting one of us on her first real chance with a good company, the first step from which merit, her own talent, was to lead her on. True, the leading woman of even this company was holding that exalted position, not exactly through her ability to play the rôle assigned her, but even at that, surely, if a woman came along who was really talented the management would much rather have the part well played, the star's personal desire to the contrary notwithstanding.

Naturally, we were decidedly short of funds by the time Miriam's season opened, but we kept up bravely. Miriam had had one taste of Mr. Idolized's temper (he rehearsed his own company) and had come home one day shedding bitter tears.

"I don't care," she stoutly maintained through her sobs, "I don't care if he kills me. I'm going to get on. This cannot stop me. I won't spend another poor summer in New York, I take my oath on that. My profession must give me a living and a comfortable one at that. I'll stick it out in spite of him or any one like him."

This was truly a glorious spirit, and I did admire her so much for it. And she was clever, and nothing should have stood in her way.

Mr. Idolized was to have a road tour of the larger cities of ten weeks and then come to New York for his annual "run," so that I had to see Miriam off and say good-bye, for we hardly knew how long, as I hoped to be on the road with some company before she returned.

I went to the train with her, and, I must say, I relished the opportunity of seeing a real New York company of the "two dollars a seat" type at close range. There certainly was an air of prosperity about the people (although they personally seemed about the same as the other two I had thus far been connected with) which lent a veneer and polish to nearly every one. The men looked well groomed and "clubbish"; the women, well or expensively gowned; but withal there were the unmistakable signs of the theatre. Where these "ear marks" begin, or where leave off, it is hard to say, yet this party of people were easily picked out individually, in all that vast

throng which surges about a railway station in a large city, as actors.

The star and his "bestest own" kept rather away from the others although those "others," with the possible exception of Miriam, were people of reputation and standing in their calling. The "bestest own" was truly a beautiful woman with lustrous black eyes, an exquisite form, and gowned in the daintiest of traveling costumes. But she had a cold, flinty sort of expression, and a discontented air, which plainly told she was anything but a happy woman and which, to me, materially detracted from her looks.

The same general air of good fellowship reigned with the members of this company, as did on the setting out of my first organization. One would have thought it a pleasure party starting on its tour of the world. Everyone was laughing and chatting with everyone else, and Miriam gaily introduced me all around to everyone except the star and leading woman, who still stood a little apart from all of us. So much high spirits gets into one's blood so that I found myself drifting along with the general feeling, joking and laughing as heartily, and feeling as gay as if I had several engagements awaiting me when I should return to Broadway and enough money to last me for years even if I didn't get one of them. And this is a part of the deceptive "good time" the average girl sees when she chances to meet a theatrical company at a depot or just arriving at hotels. There is a hum and light heartedness constantly in evidence.

One would think each individual had never known a care in the world.

Isn't it Paul Laurence Dunbar who said: "We wear a mask that laughs and grins"? And we of the profession publicly wear it as a matter of second nature. We wear it gushingly, affectedly, but we do wear it, and, saddest of all, we wear it not to deceive others, *but ourselves*. We are *not* a careless, happy, laughing people, but we like to think we are, and to this end as with the dining throng at Delmonico's, we still go on seeking for a happiness we appear to others to have found.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS JEWEL SHINE AND OTHERS.

I will not dwell upon my loneliness, after Miriam's departure, nor my really desperate struggle to make the little money she was able to leave me keep a roof over my head or food in my mouth. As September wore on I became alarmed and told my one hundred dollar agent that I was almost penniless, but that if a final effort was used in my behalf I would gladly give that amount of money again out of my season's salary; so I was sent to a manager whose company was rehearsing in one of the local theatres.

"It's Miss Jewel Shine's first season as a star," the agent explained, "and she wants to show her husband he isn't the only one who can have his name in big letters; so she is very particular, and there is a bit of a part she is having some difficulty in filling, at all events none of the girls I've sent seem to suit her. I'll tell you, secretly, what I think the trouble is. Don't go to meet her, looking too pretty. Miss Jewel Shine is rather a pretty woman, herself, and I think she wants the monopoly. Just brush your hair back rather straight, and if she asks you if you object to making the part a bit 'eccentric' tell her you do not, and I fancy you'll get it."

I did.

Miss Jewel Shine simply "froze onto me" with my straightly smoothed back hair, unbecoming sailor hat, and generally unattractive appearance. The part, I found, was really that of a sweet young girl chum of the stellar rôle, and I quickly saw why no curls nor furbelows were to be allotted to me. I, too, was given the munificent salary of fifty dollars a week, and, was now also with a company of the "first water."

I could hardly believe my good fortune and wrote a volume about it to Miriam. How delighted she was, dear girl, and more than pleased that I had not had to use the stratagem she did to obtain the opportunity! But I would not allow her to feel that way for I certainly had been underhand in offering a bonus over the regular commission fee to the agent; a fee which legitimately should have been half my first week's salary.

Miss Jewel Shine bought my gowns, as she was very particular that they should be right; which being interpreted, after I saw them, meant—ugly. But I didn't care. The part was a fairly good one played "straight," and after reading it over, with some most valuable hints from one of the ablest of stage directors, I saw where it would really stand out a splendid character bit if it were rendered as a quaint, rather gawky girl. The director who rehearsed us was as gentlemanly a fellow as I have met in the profession. He was patient and kind. I never saw him lose his temper, nor heard him use an improper word. What

is more, he, in our language, "knew his business"; that is, he was a master of stage craft. He worked to develop the play and characters as if it really was a pleasure and a joy, and I believe that such it was to him. He took a great interest in me, when he saw the line on which I was trying to work out my rôle, and entered thoroughly into the spirit of the interpretation.

With his help I set to work to do my utmost, feeling that all that was necessary was not to tread on the toes of the star with regard to looks, and the rest was to do my best for the good of the production.

Alas! I reckoned without my host. We had a New York production, and since it is unusual for a very young woman to characterize, I made that most sought after and enviable of all things artistically—a New York hit! I had notices; real ones; beautiful little compliments of several lines apiece from the critics in the New York papers. My head fairly swam with the sudden and unexpected glory.

About the middle of the first week rehearsals were called to make some cuts in the play which was too long. Slowly, by degrees and after much wrangling with the author, the capable director (who was only a producer and whose services were ended after the play was launched) not being present, my dear, darling little part emerged a poor, weak puny skeleton of lines just sufficient to hold together the thread of the story of the play. Miss Jewel Shine went even further to gently, but coldly, inform me that "while

my make-up *seemed* all right, it would be just as well if I did not appear quite so 'grotesque' and above all try to play the girl like a human being and not a caricature out of a haystack novel." In other words I was to try to play it "straight" and uninteresting.

To say that my heart was nearly broken but feebly expresses it. It was as if I had a beautiful child and someone cut off its hair, broke its nose, and disfigured it, generally, beyond recognition. I had given to this gawky little Miss my soul and thought, until she became a living, breathing entity, yet a part of me. Never can I describe the feeling of having this other individuality of mine so abused and distorted. How gladly would I have resigned in someone else's favor, but, alas, as Miriam had quoted, "I needed the money," and my one thought was a thanksgiving that the lovely star had not discharged me as well as broken my beloved dolly.

If misery loves company, I had some consolation in the fact I was not the only one whose life was made wretched by this woman's jealousy. The leading man had his troubles thick and fast. This lady star found out where the various situations and applause fell to his share and promptly invented bits of "business" which would divert the attention of the audience from him to herself when he most needed its support. He not only stood it, but, to use the vernacular, he "stood for it" as it is not every day we are permitted even to be persecuted in a New York theatre.

I dismiss this side of my first full season in a first-class company, not because such treatment stopped with the slashing to pieces of my lines, by any means, for the entire season of thirty-six weeks was one series of small persecutions on the part of our star, but because there were other conditions which prevailed that I consider of much more importance to be uncovered.

The star with whom my fortunes for the nonce were cast, was, besides being a perfect virago in the theatre, a woman of most unsavory character out of it. She was the wife of a prominent actor and had played in his company for several seasons, much to his detriment for she was, from an artistic point of view, a most crude and unlettered being. She was coarse of speech and manner, personally, yet on the stage she affected a daintiness so foreign to her that it took shape in a series of guttural sounds and choppy manner of reading quite difficult of comprehension. A gentleman and scholar, who witnessed her performance that year, asked me in all seriousness if she were not an ambitious amateur, yet she had been on the stage then nearly ten years. Her history, as told by almost any member of the profession, was that of a woman, disqualified for a walk of life into which she strangely married when a girl, by indiscretions, who sought the stage as a larger field in which to indulge her love of "a good time." Her following being legion, she married an unsuspecting young fellow to help her climb into the realm of

fame; for, of course, her ambition was vaulting; then, safely ensconced behind his name, she turned to the followers and bade them spend their money in her behalf, assuring them that her society was well worth the expenditure.

And they spent it, that season, like water. In every city, not one, but many "men about town" hovered around this Delilah anxious to do her homage. While her managers guarded her reputation to a certain extent in the papers, she was absolutely impervious as to what any one thought of her, so long as she was pleasing herself. She drank very hard; mostly champagne, not only at the suppers she attended constantly, but also in the dressing room, which latter fact often sent her on the stage in a condition anything but conducive of a smooth performance.

At such times as this would our lives be made miserable by her unreasonable demand upon us to keep scenes going straight when she would, in a maudlin way, twist them into almost inconceivable shapes by saying the last act lines in the first, the second in the third, and so on *ad libitum*, *ad infinitum*, until we were ready to scream with the horror of it all; for horror it was to the ones whose minds were clear enough to know how things were going, and who had to tremble and grin and try their best that the public should not realize the true state of affairs. And how strange it is that seldom does that great body seem to feel that anything is amiss! I

have seen this woman fall to her knees, unable to stand; the curtain rung down; the stage manager make a smypathetic little speech regarding some sad news she had received, which had completely unnerved her, and asking the audience's indulgence on "a most unhappy little woman"; the curtain again rung up, after she had been doctored a bit, and the performance proceed amid most frequent outbursts of applause from the smypathetic audience every time she would make her appearance.

This kind of woman comes under the head of those who go upon the stage because "they like the life" and not those to whom this book is dedicated. I agree with the average stage defender, that in this kind of case she would be the same in any other walk of life. The stage never *makes* such women as this bad. *But it does afford an opportunity for them to indulge their vanity and wickedness.*

This company comprised, as did the one with which Miriam had gone, some of the best-known people in the profession; what is designated as "a carefully selected cast of well-known players." Almost all of the men had the well groomed, clubby look which symbolizes the successful actor. Of the women there were but four: the star, who never spoke to any member of the company aside from giving a sarcastic cutting direction as to the performance; a well-known and really admirable "heavy woman"; my humble self; and an excellent character woman; a really fine artist who, by the way, was also held in

bounds by the star not to act if she could possibly help it. The thought often occurred to me that season, as I watched some splendid material curbing and dwarfing itself to keep within the limit of the desires of the lady who paid the salaries, why engage so much talent only to have it smolder dimly in the background that the none too luminous light of the star may shimmer with more effulgence? But the idea is, the public must have well-known names to assure it that the play will be well interpreted, when every effort is made by the one in power that, after the advertising has been done, this supposed sequence of things logical is exactly what shall not happen.

One man we had as a character comedian the season before, under other circumstances, had made a great hit in a New York production. In our company he was personally considered one of the most brilliant of wits. At first I listened to his incessant prattle, expecting each sentence to hear something refreshing. One of the specimens of his marvelous cleverness (which is about the only printable one I ever heard him say) was a changing of the name of the "Society for the Prevention of Vice" to the "Society for the prevention of everything that's interesting"; and brought forth incessant "God! but he's clever" from the adoring heavy woman. But I soon found that most of his babble was of a nature coarser than I could endure, and I was quite unable even to summon a weak grin at innuendoes which would send the admirers of this

intellectual clown into convulsions of laughter. Hence I was once more dubbed "Virgin Mary," evidently the most contemptuous epithet which can be bestowed upon a woman in the theatrical profession; and then my troubles began. This wonderful wit would save his best (?) until I was within hearing and then let them go rough shod to the great delight of his adorers and the consternation of "the virgin." "God, but he is a bright fellow," the heavy woman would inform me on every occasion she could. Such brains, such intellect, such wit, but," and she would look down at me from her impressive height, "he is much too subtle for the average mind to appreciate. I never saw his equal."

Nor I, and I never wish to again. I tried, at last, to show that I did not hear him, but this only led to the very worst situation I could possibly have arranged for myself. There was a scene in the play where I was obliged to talk "aside" or in pantomime to this man while others were having some dialogue down stage. This was his opportunity; into my helpless ears was poured such intellectual (?) vileness that it is quite inconceivable how it could emanate from any human brain. He would learn by heart the medical advertisements addressed to women and to men individually, found in newspapers, and quote them word for word, explaining, as he went along, what the advertiser had chosen, for decency's sake, to veil.

I appealed to the manager and was heartily laughed at. To the star I dared not speak, and I bore the

situation for thirty-six weeks with absolutely no relief. I used vainly to hope he would weary of it after a time and cease to torture me, but it was evidently meat, drink and life to him, and it continued to the end. I learned later that he was trying, that season, to break off the use of a drug (which habit eventually killed him) and that he was more nervous and persistent because of this. But I can only think of him in one way, and that is with a keen desire to scour his mind, just as one would anything which had become tarnished and covered with filth.

I cannot say, however, that the season was entirely devoid of interest. A New York "run" is not hard work, and the travel with this company was exceptionally easy, as only large cities were visited. Then the character woman who, while she was hale fellow well met with every one in the company, was, I believe in my soul, not only a good woman, but a superior one. She was very kindly disposed to me although she used to laugh at my vexation with regard to the "wit." She liked stories of *double entente* herself, but she carefully avoided telling them to me. Her constant cry in all our conversations was: "Give it up child, don't spend your life in this awful business." But she had such a good natured way of saying things, they never made any impression.

She talked a great deal to me, but was very chummy with the heavy woman, the latter rather patronizing her, since her professional standing was good and her acquaintance large. In fact she and her husband had

been prominent stars when both were young, "and thereby hangs a tale."

Although this dear woman told me word for word what I am about to relate, I feel no compunction in repeating it for she told it to any one she might choose to and most of it is public knowledge. Above all, it can only serve to show her in a most sympathetic light and emphasize the true condition of things theatrical.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHARACTER WOMAN'S STORY AND A SURPRISE.

Mrs. Actwell married when very young an exceedingly handsome and brilliant actor. She also was a clever and beautiful artist, and they made a great success in a drama which had a vogue for many years. Several children were born to them, and although they had ups and downs in a financial way they were ideally happy. For many years they starred and made considerable money. Then it became hard always to get a play which was successful, and, the children growing and needing her attention, Mrs. Actwell left the stage for a time, and her husband starred alone.

Somewhere on the road, a young married woman "to honor and to fame unknown," joined his company and soon became his leading lady. Various stories reached Mrs. Actwell in her pretty home in the country, but she was of a happy disposition and let them pass as idle gossip.

Mr. Actwell would return to his home in the summer and his welcome was always sincere.

After a time it appeared her husband's seasons were poor, money to maintain the country home became scarce and it was found necessary to sell it and also

for Mrs. Actwell to return to the stage. Naturally, her theatrical acquaintance was large, and she found no difficulty in obtaining a position. Mr. Actwell and his leading woman were an old story by now, but this staunch woman said no word.

One day she received a telegram at the theatre where she was playing, from a small town, asking her to come and get the child she and her husband had carelessly left in the hotel two days before. On the following Sunday, she went, but the proprietor, when he met her, said: "Why, you are not the Mrs. Actwell who was here with the show."

"I am Mrs. Actwell, however," she answered, "and I will take the baby home with me."

A beautiful little child about two years of age was brought to her, and she took it to her heart and with it returned to New York. This child has never known another mother, and at the time I met Mrs. Actwell it was with her and perfectly devoted to the woman who had given it a mother's love.

Only a few months after the desertion of the baby, the real mother disappeared from the arms of the father, with probably a younger, handsomer man, and the prodigal returned home. He was welcomed as if the past had never been, and a general family reunion took place; not only privately, but in a business sense as well, for a company was formed in which both Mr. and Mrs. Actwell were to play and also their children, now grown to maturity. For several moons this man taught his little child to call the good woman who had

adopted it "mother" without a qualm, without a blush. But the "mother" minded not; she loved the child, and she loved this wayward father of her children.

Peace reigned supreme until—oh, fatal West! In a metropolis of the far away, a young girl of only nineteen years applied to the manager for a position. There were, of course, no vacancies, but she came again and again and finally insisted that Mr. Actwell only hear her read. He did and told her she had talent which needed directing and developing and that he would give her the very first opening there was in the company. As such an opportunity meant the removal of one of the members of his own family the chances of this young woman seemed rather small, at least so thought the wife of Mr. Actwell. So absolutely did this lady consider the matter settled that she dismissed the girl from her mind. As the company was leaving the city the following Sunday, what was this good woman's consternation on seeing the buxom miss of nineteen, patrolled by her mother, enter the car.

Passing deliberately by Mrs. Actwell with heads well up and an airy fluttering as if every ruffle and tuck in their gowns were bristling with triumph, this mother piloted her ambitious progeny straight to Mr. Actwell who was standing near the door opposite the one at which they had entered.

"There," proclaimed the proud mother, "there, Mr. Actwell, I leave my daughter in *your* care, feeling

sure you will do all for her which you have been so kind as to offer to do." With a peck at the girl's face, which served for a kiss, and with one great glance of victory toward the astonished Mrs. Actwell, she sailed out of the car, happy and jubilant at having launched her young hopeful upon the sea of fame.

Mr. Actwell evidently did all he had promised. In three weeks this girl was playing the leading part, and the female members of the Actwell family were on the train bound for New York.

The young woman who took this man from his family, at the instigation of her mother, is now, and has been for many seasons, a star of somewhat doubtful radiance. Mr. Actwell is still "doing for her all he promised," that is, he is her Svengali, she his Trilby. He is a most brilliant artist and excellent teacher, and she has a faculty of inducing innumerable men to expend thousands of dollars upon her each season, thereby keeping her name constantly in large type and giving her aged benefactor (?) and herself some sort of living.

At the time I had this story from Mrs. Actwell she was in fairly good circumstances, as her health was good and her work in demand, but at present writing I was shocked only the other day to read that she was ill and in want and had applied to her fellow actors for aid. God bless and help her! She lived, as she thought, a good Christian life, but she lived it in an atmosphere where it made no impression. She was no more highly esteemed, or rather courted

or bowed down to, than is this despicable man who is held by his associates in a fairly honorable and respected position.

My season in a first-class company was not devoid of attempts at a repetition of the Steele Softlee affair of the year before; not only by one, but several of the members of the company. Making attempts at "satchel carrying," this kind of wooing is called in the profession. But I had had my lesson, and when the sarcasm of my sweet (?) tempered star, or her man Friday of a road stage manager, became almost unendurable, I took good care to shed my tears in secret that there should be no opportunities brought about from weariness, or downheartedness that required petting. The result of this coldness on my part brought to me, not a casual friendship such as the ordinary conventionalities of the times and situation should have demanded, but the absolute disdain of almost every member of the company both men and women with a possible exception of Mrs. Actwell, who was nice to everyone, in favor or out.

These people will probably say they had a great, good time all that season. Perhaps they did; the men, like sailors, with a new girl in every port, the women wined and dined by what they designated as "swell fellows" along the route. I, for one, was miserable and it seemed as if every effort was put forth to make me so. Mark Twain I believe it was who said, "Be good and you'll be lonesome." I wonder how he made the discovery. Did he ever

spend a season of thirty-six weeks in a really first-class company, cursed (for under these circumstances you are made to feel it is a curse) with a nature that could not affiliate with vulgar stories nor wine suppers?

Letters from Miriam were my chief solace, but they at first were not particularly full of sunshine. She wrote me that soon after the season opened, Bigbunch had discovered some way (probably through the gentleman himself) that Gotrox was really not her "backer" and then her "troubles began to brew." They could not easily break her contract, but a dozen and one little annoyances were heaped upon her through the business manager, who traveled with the company, as agent for Bigbunch. When this firm had convinced itself that Gotrox had not paid for her gowns, it suddenly discovered that these accessories to her performance were entirely inappropriate, and she was compelled to furnish new ones, giving up nearly half her salary each week to pay for them. However, she had great faith in Mr. Idolized, she kept writing me, as he seemed to like her work, and Miss Prettystyle was really getting worse in her part, and, too, they (Idolized and his "bestest own") quarreled continually. Miriam had succeeded in getting the understudy for the "lead," and Idolized had rehearsed her in it several times and declared himself much pleased with her.

"Of course, the temptation to send the bovine eyed Miss Prettystyle a box of fixed chocolates is very great," jestingly wrote my chum, "but as the

polished villain says 'Me time will come, Oi kin wait; Oi kin wait.' That Mr. Idolized is taking an interest in me, may speak well for next season. Eh, childy? and if I *do* get promoted you shall have the place I now occupy."

Such castles in the air as we again built by letter; but it really looked as if Miriam, at least, was on the right road at last.

I believe I have already dwelt upon the fact that we are the greatest kind of gossips about our own fraternity. The weekly dramatic papers keep us informed where we are, and the comments which pass among us, as we read, regarding our various public movements are frequent, if not always complimentary. Waiting for "cues" during performances in the wings, there are always groups throwing their fellow actors' reputations and salaries about like mental shuttle-cocks.

I was one of such a group during a performance in St. Louis just at the end of Mr. Idolized's New York "run." I had not heard from Miriam for over two weeks and was feeling quite depressed because of this fact when one of our men said to all of us in general and to no one in particular: "That's a pretty hard throw down for Prettystyle, don't you think?"

"What's that?" asked some one else.

"Why," warms up the first speaker, "it seems she and Idolized had it hot and heavy one night during a performance, and she gave her notice, as she has done on various other occasions, and, by golly, he accepted

it and, a girl, who has been her understudy, finishes the season in the part on the road. Bigbunch wouldn't let Prettystyle go until after the New York run was over."

My heart fairly ceased beating for joy. Miriam at last had her opportunity. Only it was too bad she couldn't have one or two performances in New York. Well, let us wait until next season.

"Who is the girl?" I heard some one ask, and I came back from my castle very hurriedly to hear the rest.

"A Miriam Merriworld; no one ever heard of her before, but they say she is awfully clever. Idolized told a friend of mine that he had rehearsed her in the part and she gave Prettystyle cards and spades."

How glorious this sounded to my sympathetic ears!

"Rot!" yawned the wit, (?) rising, preparatory to making his stage entrance, "as if we didn't all know Idolized. What does he care how the part is played? Did any one ever accuse Prettystyle of being able to act? and hasn't she held the position for five years? He's tired and she has simply stepped down and out as Mrs. Idolized's understudy and the new girl takes her place. Trust a veteran. Me for knowing their dodges;" and he proudly slapped himself on his shirt front and sauntered away. The remark was greeted with a general silence, which plainly meant affirmation, and Miriam's reputation was fixed; so far as this much of humanity was concerned.

A letter from Miriam next day was wild with delight, and minute as to detail of her first appearance in the leading rôle in Brooklyn; with innumerable clippings enclosed, notices anent her great success. They read almost exactly the same as Miss Prettystyle's had earlier in the season, but were enhanced by column long articles as to how a clever girl had been discovered in a night, jumping in to play a part for which she was only understudy, but acquitting herself so well that the star and management had decided to continue her in it for the remainder of the season; how she was an artistic "find" and would surely be heard of before long, accompanied by some fetching "cuts" of my pretty friend's piquant face. Miss Prettystyle might have received notices, even if she wasn't clever, but, of course, these of Miriam's must be genuine, for she was not supposed to have a "pull."

Every other sentence of the letter bubbled over with Idolized's goodness to her, and yet I could not like him for it. Why be good to her if he was cruel to another woman, simply because he was tired of her? Of course, Miriam's salary had been raised and her new gowns for this rôle furnished by the management. Fortune truly had smiled, and I was glad; that is, I would have been if my witty (?) colleague had only refrained from his innuendoes.

Miriam's letters became less frequent, but not less tender and still full of advice to pocket my prudishness, for, of course, I poured out my woes to her. She now referred to Idolized as "Bob," but it is a most ordinary

thing for us all to address one another by our Christian names. In fact, it is done almost universally in the theatrical profession.

The end of the season at last arrived, and Miriam wrote me to hie me to a certain hotel in New York where she would meet me the next week and tell me all our plans as she had made them for the summer and next season. I felt like a convict must feel when released from prison, as I set foot in the great metropolis once more, alone and free to go where I pleased, but above all, *with whom* I pleased. It is, after all, our daily associations which make or mar a town, city, steamer or traveling company, say what you will. The world is all right every time. It's the people nearest to us who cause the trouble.

It was very fine to be able to pass the rented room district and take an apartment in a fairly good hotel. I had not time to be lonesome now, for Miriam soon arrived and was evidently as glad to see me as I to have her with me once again.

She was really more beautiful than ever. In fact she was radiant now, and simply bubbled and beamed with the enjoyment of rubbing shoulders with the good things of life. She was immaculately dressed, and, for once, in good taste; and how she laughed, now, at our stage gowned dinner of scarcely a year ago.

"How could we have done such a thing?" she would exclaim and then go off into musical laughter at the memory of it. She never mentioned Gotrox, however, nor did I. In fact I was only too happy to forget him.

After hours of telling me of her great success as a leading woman, talking now in a sweetly modulated voice with only occasional lapses into the swinging and slangy style she had when I first met her, with just a touch of affectation in tone and gesture (which was not at all unbecoming), she detailed our summer's vacation.

"You see, Prudy," she said, "I once declared I should not spend another summer sweltering in New York, and I have plenty of money to—"

I stopped her abruptly with: "Miriam, I have quite enough to see me through, dear, and you have your mother and sister, you know."

"Yes, I do know," and her eyes softened, "and, dearie, I'm going to send for them, and we will go to some nice, quiet seaside place and rest and just love life together. Shall we?"

"Well," I returned, a bit dubious, "it will have to be a *very* quiet place, because I couldn't afford fine clothes and a summer's keep too."

"Then we won't do anything fashionable, but we will be comfortable."

Mr. Idolized dined with us once before he sailed for England, where he always spent his summers with his wife and children. The latter were attending school abroad, and Mrs. Idolized lived there to be near them. Of course, he was very charming to meet. In fact his specialty was that of a *matinée* hero, and the peculiar animal magnetism, which goes to make the anomaly so worshiped of the chocolate eating

patrons of the theatre, asserts itself in private quite as much as on the stage. Yet he was not brilliant, nor even brainy, and he talked "shop" rather than art. I excused this, however, at that time, on the ground that he had but this opportunity to tell us of our respective rôles in the new play (for I had been elected a member of the company without even having seen the firm of Bigbunch), and of course we must know all we could about that. From his conversation, I judged he must be a master workman at dramatic technique, and I found this verified in my professional association with him later. Yet I assert he knew his rule and rote mostly from a native instinct, for scholar he was not.

After dinner, Miriam and he took a stroll up Fifth Avenue, and I did not see him again, as he had said a kindly good-bye to me at the door of the restaurant. When this leading woman friend of mine returned, she reminded me of nothing so much as a fragrant American beauty rose. All flushed and dimpled and smiling she caught me about the neck and kissing me heartily cried:

"Oh, he is just the dearest thing, Prudy; a really, truly friend. He is going to 'make me,' he says, if I mind him and study and learn as he can teach me. I'll be a star in less than three years. Isn't it glorious?"

Indeed it was, yet some imp of Satan made me ask with a silly grin:

"*He* didn't want you to go to Europe with him, did he?"

Her face was long in an instant, and she became tremendously sober.

"No," she answered firmly, "and that was rather an unkind remark for you to make, dear. You must not think all people are bad just because we happen to have met a few, and, of course, people in our profession are apt to be very much maligned."

"Then Miss Prettystyle wasn't his 'bestest own'?" I asked quickly; glad enough would I have been to hear that even her suspicions had had no foundation.

"Well," Miriam blushed crimson, "that might have been an affair, but people sometimes make mistakes in life, and I do not think it should always be held up against them."

She came over to me as I stood by the window gazing out on the busy street, and putting her hands on my shoulders turned me towards her and looked me seriously in the eyes.

"Prudy," she said, her voice sounded most musical in its earnest tone, "I want you to be a good, loyal friend and always trust me, will you, dear? I'm worth it, believe me, and I want you to stay with me, near me, and be my companion, and stand by me. People have faith in that thoughtful face of yours, and I am determined to stand right in the eyes of the public come what may. You won't desert me, will you?"

I promised faithfully to be a friend through thick and thin, partly because I, too, wished to protect her in the eyes of the world, and moreover I felt that a

woman's sustaining influence near her would enable and strengthen her to help herself; to keep her daily life as spotless as she seemed to wish her public one to appear. She thanked me heartily with an evidence of relief I found it quite impossible to understand then.

So that day I laid aside my personal ambition. After all was it not better to concentrate our forces on making Miriam great than for me to struggle, too, for a high position, and possibly not attain it after all.

Perhaps I was a little tired of it already, yet would not confess it even to myself. Many times that second year had I been compelled to strangle the feeling of homesickness, as hungrily I longed to play the prodigal and throw myself at my aunt's feet. But there is something of the puritan predominant in my make-up, too; and I had burnt my bridges behind me, not being big and brave enough to acknowledge defeat. Besides, if I could be associated with Miriam's companies I would be with congenial people, and, after all, the pleasure of characterization was as great in a subordinate position as in that of those who shine more conspicuously in the public gaze. Now if I had a good part in the new play Miriam would not be jealous and cut it to pieces and I would find my happiness in doing what I had to do well, and in helping her. As I now look back on all that has passed before my watching eyes, I wonder if I am thankful enough for that day when ambition's fires smoldered away into ashes and left me content to be a grub and cease trying to become a butterfly.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUCCESS AS A NARCOTIC.

We spent the summer months at a semi-fashionable seaside resort on Long Island. We were cool most of the time, but I cannot say comfortable. Mrs. Merriworld and Jeanne, Miriam's sister, joined us before we left New York. The former was a weak, negative little woman. One associated her instinctively with a needle and some cloth, and as she scarcely ever spoke except in monosyllables this gave the impression of a habit formed keeping the little steel instrument flying at its vocation.

Jeanne was a strapping girl of about sixteen years who, her mother insisted had spinal trouble, but to me she showed no signs of anything save laziness and a great idea about going through (as she expressed it) "High."

Miriam was intensely devoted to both and tried every way to gratify their wants so far as it lay in her power, and they accepted her new found good fortune as a matter of course and their share in it as their just dues. No doubt it was. I have no knowledge of the family history previous to meeting Miriam in New York. I know they both thought her tremendously clever and worshiped her as something

rather sacred and above them. In their minds she was invincible and, like the king, "could do no wrong."

The summer papers all over the country contained pictures of Miriam quite often and squibs, or short articles, about her sudden rise to prominence; the important part Mr. Idolized felt justified in trusting her with the coming season; what great things the public might expect of her in a few years; and that she was now summering on Long Island with her mother and sister and Miss Prudence Gray, the latter her constant companion. Incidentally, from that time on, I was seldom, if ever, referred to in the papers except with this distinguishing qualification. Miriam's interviews of the next season always contained the clause that her mother, who was unable to travel with her because of her needed care to an invalid daughter, would never have consented that Miss Merriworld go with any company alone, but for the superior companionship of Miss Gray who was a girl of lofty principles and most devoted to Miriam. Of this, however, more anon.

Mr. Idolized also figured in the summer news; his squibs preceding Miriam's nearly always, and in all of them he was going over his next season's plans and plays in the bosom of his family in Merry England.

There was one other actress at our summer resort, also with her mother and sister; a very pretty blonde girl who looked to be not more than twenty years old. She was known to the occupants of the hotel as Edward Funniman's leading woman, and to the

profession, as Tom Racetrack's "girl," this latter individual a man of some distinction in the world of money and quite old enough to have been this pretty blonde Miss's grandfather. The mother was a lively, girlish thing who most evidently took keen enjoyment out of her daughter's enviable (?) position and the money they all three spent with a none too economical hand. The younger sister was most palpably being brought up to "follow in sister's footsteps" as she was religiously guarded from the attentions of young men with no prospects, while there seemed to be a constant watchfulness to be "nice" to the older men of wealth. The men of the resort were nearly all attentive to both our professional families, and some of the women patronized us, considering it interesting, I suppose, to know someone belonging to the world of celebrities, while others as utterly ignored our existence as if we had not been on earth.

The summer dragged miserably to Miriam, I could see. She was nervous and restless and kept sighing that she wished to be back at work, that she was anxious to get at the new part; and wasn't it too bad warm weather had to break in and take us away from what we really enjoyed? What a humdrum, monotonous life it must be not to have an art to be interested in and what a glorious, soul filling thing it was to have one! I, too, would much rather put in a year at work than two weeks of idleness, but I think I did not allow the thought to upset my nerves as it did Miriam's.

Yet even a long lane has a turn, and almost before we knew it we were sweltering in New York attending to gowns and rehearsals, deep in the glories of getting ready for the new season. And it was delightful, that sense of having enough money to supply one's wants and to pick out and plan all the pretty things to wear, to go through most interesting hours in the theatre developing a new play, to whisk away in a cab to the modist's, dine well and in dainty surroundings, and then off to a theatre or roof garden in the evening. Life began to take on a rosy hue which became actually intoxicating and utterly and totally blinding.

Our rehearsals were Paradise. Mr. Idolized, master of technique that he was, made the hours in the theatre seem like interesting lectures on stage craft. He "dearied" all the ladies and "old manned" all the men and asked one so sweetly to "kindly make that line a little more emphatic" or "this 'cross' if you please, a trifle earlier," or he would take time to explain a dramatic reason for such and such emphasis or stage direction, that it was simply bliss to try to please him by being attentive and working hard. Miriam had said he was cross the season before, when she first joined his company, while rehearsing. How was it possible? A more patient, kind and courteous gentleman it would be quite impossible to meet.

"Isn't Bob a wonder this season?" I heard one of the men remark to another.

"Nothing to keep a baby in a good humor like a new toy," returned the one addressed, and then he was furiously nudged by the first speaker as he suddenly discovered I was looking at them.

Miriam surely did develop under such an excellent tutor, and gave a splendid performance of, while not a difficult, at least a very interesting rôle. My part was none too pleasing as I was informed at the last moment before rehearsals began that a young girl to whose friend, or relative (I never did quite understand which) Mr. Idolized was under some obligation and who had great influence with Bigbunch, had been given the ingenue rôle originally intended for me, according to Mr. Idolized's conversation at that summer's dinner. Later on, I found that the "influence" of this young girl took the shape somewhat of the several thousand dollars it cost to get up the production of the new play.

A theatrical manager takes the financial risk of a new play out of his own coffers *never*, if he can help it.

We embarked on our preliminary road tour prior to the annual New York engagement of ten weeks or more as the play might warrant; and if all seasons and all companies could have the atmosphere of peace and good will which apparently pervaded ours, especially where Miriam and I were concerned, then indeed might we stand on the street corners and invite suffering humanity to enter into the joys of life through the realms of art and a theatrical organ-

ization. Mr. Idolized couldn't do enough for every one; our traveling comforts were looked after minutely; the hotels instructed to give us every comfort. Miriam always had a suite, and I a room adjoining. Sometimes Mr. Idolized stayed at the same hotel where we resided and sometimes he joined his local male friends at clubs. He was a member of, or had cards to, some club in almost every city which we visited.

Such comfort, ease, and enjoyment has indeed an hypnotic effect. I was in a dream, an illusion until I began soundly to hate myself for the suspicious way in which I had evidently gone to work in my profession. I felt, indeed, that I had made up my mind before hand that every one was bad, and I really had been "looking for trouble" as the boys say. How we were dined, Miriam and I, by people of wealth; charming people of Bohemian disposition; people of brains, people without, but all bent upon making life one soft, dulcet dream from which we longed to awaken "nevermore"! What more encouraging symptom to the standing of our calling than this social attention and respect? Sometimes Mr. Idolized took Miriam to a supper given by his bachelor friends, and I would not be asked, but usually, if families were in evidence, I was always included and made much of as the special angel guardian of a dear girl's reputation and honor.

So delusive, insidious, and conscience deadening was this sort of existence that for weeks, almost

months, I found myself quietly accepting it as the real demonstration of life and living; that things I might have at other times considered unconventional, now seemed only to fit harmoniously into the atmosphere which surrounded us. For instance, it became only right and proper that Miriam should deny me admittance to her room, if Mr. Idolized happened to be in it, and quite the most natural thing as they undoubtedly had business to talk over; that he called her "dearest" and "sweetheart" in the presence of the members of the company, as it was the custom of all my associates to use endearing terms to every one, even their most hated rivals; that the members of the company salaamed, bowed, and scraped to us (I shone in reflected glory) actually as if we belonged to some royal court. Never did I hear a suspicion of a whisper from any one as to Miriam's relations with the star, and while I now know that she was daily, hourly thrashed and raked over the gossipy coals in private, a keenness, almost superhuman, kept any sign or word from reaching us.

Slowly and almost from a sub-consciousness, as if an intuition of danger pervaded my senses, the situation dawned upon me, as night after night I would be dismissed with a sweet "pleasant dreams" from Miriam while she fitted her key in her door, as if quite anxious for me not to intrude upon solitude, nor do I know now what special happening caused my dulled and voluptuously stupefied mind to respond to a qualm; and even when it did I fought for weeks

to down the truth and gave myself long lectures on the "Judge-not-that-ye-be-not-judged" verse in the Good Book (which, incidentally, is quietly and meaningly quoted very often in daily conversations by those who skate on rather thin ice) until it got on my nerves to such an extent that I shook myself one night as from a stupor and decided at last to open my eyes and to open them wide.

I discovered, when I began to be awake, first and foremost that I was being used as a great convenience. Apart from our advance press stuff, the papers contained articles about the beautiful friendship existing between Miriam and myself, a friendship which dated back in both our families almost to time immemorial; that we had attended the same convent: Miriam's intensely artistic temperament was curbed and strengthened and turned in the right direction by my more sober and practical nature; that my high ideals were of the utmost spiritual good to a girl, who, thrown so early into artistic prominence, found necessarily many temptations and snares. In other words, I was the constant, steady, exemplary guardian of virtue for this girl, that the public might be impressed to exclaim:

"Here is a young person who has come up like a mushroom, and yet, by her superior talents only, has she achieved such success."

Why? Why? Why? Will you tell me? If one has used stratagem to advance, why wish to appear an angel of right and honor? How misleading are such

articles to others who are struggling to play the game fairly, and who do not see the seamy side. Yet we do insist on posing as paragons of goodness, virtue and morality, who, unaided except by our very superior cleverness and divine talent, carve our way to fame and fortune. This is the sweet morsel of honey which we roll on our tongues, and from it abstract the anæsthetic that dulls our conscience to the real state of things. Alas! Alack! we are as children; we wish to eat our cake, yet keep it too, and we can bear anything willingly, save approbrium. In other words, be we what we may, we desire to be *considered* all that we should be, even if we are not.

I did not look far nor long, to see that we were living in luxurious deceit, in voluptuous delusion; basking in the effulgence of a day dream which had "neither purity nor religion to recommend it to the grace of God, the smile of friends, nor the esteem of the world," to quote from an old, but beautiful story.

One night Miriam had sent me to the hotel in a cab while she and Bob went in another, and while she had done this a number of times before, pleading an engagement in which I had not been included, I usually thought nothing of it, being glad enough to get to my hotel. This night I bit my lips and secretly determined to wait until she should return and then demand to know from her own lips how she stood, not in the eyes of her public but in mine as a friend and (I now realized) a convenience.

She came to her rooms in less than an hour. Ordinarily I would have been asleep, but I was waiting for her now. Bob was with her; so I joined Mr. and Mrs. Oldwinker at supper in the ladies' dining room of the hotel, and it was nearly two o'clock when I returned. Bob came out of Miriam's room as I started to put my key in my door; so I waited until he turned the corner of the hall, and then I knocked at her door instead. She asked who it was from the other side and I told her. The door swung hurriedly open, and she looked at me in alarm and asked if I was ill.

"No," I said coldly, "I want to come in. I have something to say."

She stood back for me to enter although a frown puckered her pretty brow. As she closed the door and turned to me, the light from the chandelier fell upon her, and I saw she was robed in one of her daintiest and softest negligée gowns which completely enveloped her; a Parisian creation of palest lavender silk crepe and creamy lace hanging in such folds of grace and symmetry that she filled my artistic eye with delight, even at that moment. Her unusually wavy and luxuriant hair was rippling over the shoulders of this gown, and her feet were encased in Turkish slippers.

"This is rather a late, or shall we say early hour for a talk, Prudy," she said as she noticed my scrutinizing look.

"Yet Bob has just gone," I returned, a sort of gasp in my voice denoting a nervousness I fain would have concealed.

"Yes," she answered carelessly, "he came in with me to read the scenario of the new play. He thinks we will put it on a few weeks this spring and try it so as not to risk a whole season on it, as it is by an untried author."

"Did it take him two hours to read it?" I asked, standing, Portia like, near her round table, my hand resting on its cold marble.

She laughed a trifle nervously and said with a shade of impatience:

"Nearly."

"Miriam," I gasped, the words seeming really to freeze in my mouth, "what is Bob Idolized to you?"

She returned my gaze steadily, loftily if you will, (how often have I wondered if our stage attitudes do not cause dissembling to become second nature) and answered firmly:

"A very good friend; as you have much cause to know, nothing more."

"I had much cause to know." Ah, then! since I, too, owed my position to him I must perforce keep my eyes and mouth shut tightly. Perhaps this was really the reason I had been doing so up to now. I was overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude which forbade me from inquiring into others' affairs, especially as it was to these others I was indebted for my daily

bread, to say nothing of the sweet and highly frosted cakes which were also thrown my way.

But I am Prudence, and I now saw myself face to face with a problem from which I had no intention of turning away.

"How can you say 'nothing more'," I persisted, "when I have seen him make love to you for months?"

She flushed, slightly, and moving sinuously across the room threw herself in an easy chair, a graceful, fluffy, puff of silk and lace.

"Oh, well, when it comes to that," she sighed, "of course he is fond of me."

I sat, too, near the table under the glare of the chandelier and on the very edge of an uncomfortable upright chair. Nor did I take my eyes from her face.

"And you, Miriam," I was almost choking now and fairly shivering, dreading to hear what must follow, yet doggedly determined not to turn back. "You, Miriam—you!—do—you—love him?" the last words dying out in a chattering whisper.

"With all my soul," she answered immediately and with the fervor which any good woman might use in avowing the first great passion of her life.

I murmured, "Good God!" and the hot tears sprang to my eyes, and all my nervous anger turned to a great wave of pity and compassion. She sat there, before me, so beautiful, so young, so full of the joy of living, and I knew she was telling me of the first and only absorbing love which had come into her existence; a love so great it had engulfed her and

lured her on to a blind and consuming illusion. What could I say? What do? I felt I wanted to snatch her from the harm and taint such a chimera would lead her to, yet it seemed that to do so I would be a criminal, a monster, should I exclaim: "This happiness is not for you." And the tears overflowed my eyes and spattered on my hands, my gown, but still I gazed at her; now, it seemed, in speechless agony.

She was looking, too, at me, but gently, calmly, almost with a benign expression, and when she spoke again, in that softly modulated tone which she affected on all occasions now, I listened breathless, almost stunned, to what was, to her, I knew, a full justification for all her life as she was living it then.

"You see, Prudy," she slowly began, "when the firm of Bigbunch discovered that Mr. Gotrox was not putting up for me, as I wrote you at the time, they made my life one of perfect martyrdom; at first in small ways such as you yourself have experienced; then in the matter of the gowns. That put me in debt, and Mamma was writing me that she also was in great straits and, of course I simply had to send money to her. Mr. Idolized saw I was harassed and told me once that it showed in my work on the stage. I tried to be strong, but it was almost unbearable; one day when he was rehearsing me in the understudy of the lead, and we were quite alone in the theatre, I broke down and told him all about the Gotrox affair, the firm's attitude, and my finances.

"He was most sympathetic to me and indignant towards the management, and gave little Tool, through whom the pettiness was being done, a firm and none too gentle piece of his mind.

"Then he paid him what was due on my gowns and would not let me even thank him, much less give him back the money. Of course, I was intensely grateful and naturally felt warmly towards him. As to Prettystyle, people are very keen to say he got tired of her, but she was making his life anything but merry at that time, and that is why he acted so irritable at rehearsals that year. They quarreled continually, and after all he had done for her, too, and when he finally did let her go I'm sure she rushed at once into Joe Swellstar's arms. Anybody or anything, with that lady, so long as she gets a good position," she slangily ended, warming to her subject, and this successor to the position Prettystyle had held, drew herself up, and her eyes flashed at the memory of the woman whose loss had been her gain.

You see it is because the other *woman* is always to blame; never the man we love.

That Miriam's gratitude ripened into love under Bob's gentle kindness and helpfulness, seemed to her only the most natural sequence of events; at any rate, she found herself from the day of Miss Prettystyle's departure safe at rest in his strong arms, with a universe of happiness at her command and a world to conquer at her feet. That there was even a suspicion of a sense of wrong doing on her part never entered

her mind. She would as firmly assert this as I. From whence should it come? Who was there to censure, to condemn? Those who had bowed and smiled upon Miss Prettystyle, now bowed and smiled on her. She had lost nothing. Far from it. She had achieved; she had attained a degree of eminence, and hers was the heart to be proud, not contrite. Alas, the one cry from blissful emotions of a moment such as that to Miriam is:

"I love! I love! I love! Mine the right to love! Mine the right to love! I am supremely, grandly happy."

My teeth were sunk deep into my lips, and the tears were thicker, faster, hotter as they coursed down my burning cheeks. Miriam still sat before me calm, contented, almost exultantly defiant. What could I say? She might really have found the key to happiness. Why should it not come to her this way, simply because you or I might consider it unconventional? We have a right to love. Who can deny it? And when it comes in such fullness as it had to this girl, did not all nature call out to accept it, to take it as her one divine right?

Why, then, did *I* weep? Why pity her? Like some Sibyl of Fate, I sat in the glare of the light overhead, weaving in my prophetic mind's eye only a thread of misery and desolation for her I loved sitting there opposite me, smiling and palpitating, in her physical joy. Why croak so, Raven Prudy? You, even you, are not a judge.

Four silly words kept pounding at my brain like little devils keeping time to a relentless, monotonous engine.

"He has a wife. He has a wife. He has a wife."

"And what of that?" said I to the beating, strumming, machine-like little imps. "Miriam is happy. She must be happy. It is her right."

Miriam's voice now sounded far away, my inner self was talking so loudly to those invisible tormentors:

"Prudy dear, please don't look like that. I am not a criminal, really. When you love, as I pray some day you may, you will understand and love me just as well."

The devils beat louder than ever, "He has a wife," and then I knew they had said it aloud through my lips.

"Yes," answered Miriam more gently than ever, "he has, but legal ties are not always those of happiness. I have thought of that too, but Bob has assured me that for years Mrs. Idolized has only been a dear friend to him, thoroughly, almost selfishly, wrapped up in her children, quite to the exclusion of his welfare or life."

"*Her* children?" I asked mechanically.

"Well, his too, of course, but she usurps them as if they did not belong to him. You see they were married when both were young, before they knew their own hearts, and if they have discovered that they were mistaken, and she found contentment in her children while he still longed for a companionship she

could not give him, how is he to blame when another woman brings to him an undivided love which can fill his life, if he accepts it; especially since she is willing to give it even under these circumstances."

No, no, we will not blame him. The man we love is never to blame. We may sin in loving him, but our "king can do no wrong."

Miriam seemed to see that she was gaining ground and continued softly:

"We are so apt, as individuals, to shut ourselves up in a neatly woven cocoon of selfishness and look at the lives of others from the narrow confines of *our* ideas of virtue. Life, in reality, is complex and broad, and no one personality is capable of directing the temperament of another. This, we may go further and say, is true of communities and countries. What seems to be moral and legal to one nation is considered immoral and illegal in another. Take for instance, the marriage tie as we view it and as it is established in, let us say Turkey. In the latter country it is considered an honor to be a concubine, here we would name it a disgrace. These things are purely as we train ourselves to accept them. But life holds so much of genuine happiness if we will only come out of our cocoons and, like the butterfly, soar to heights above, beyond conventionalities; look with a broader vision, down from the stars, not up from the mire. Ah, Prudy, be big, be happy! some day you will learn that to love as I do breaks every barrier in life away, and makes one wish to take the whole world with her

to share her bliss, that it leaves no room for hate, malice, nor petty criticism of the lives of others."

How long she continued in this line of argument I do not know. The minutes, hours slipped by, and I sat as one charmed, enthralled. At last she rose in her lavender loveliness as if it were time for me to go. Like one in a dream and thoroughly hypnotized by the force of her animal spirits, bubbling, palpitating, physical, I threw myself into this goddess' arms, looking upon her as something beyond and above me and mere earth, an exalted being who had soared in realms of æsthetic bliss, and gathered, from mental heights, a light of reason far beyond my mundane limited comprehension. Clinging to her, I wept, absorbing, imbibing, and drinking in something of the atmosphere of the love which exalted her; she soothed and comforted me as a great, noble mother might have done, murmuring that she fully and freely *forgave me* for my doubts and hard thoughts and when I finally said good-night it was with a sobby, yet happy, excitement such as a child feels when the wrong doing and punishment have been wiped away with a kiss, and I was gigglingly, delightedly conscious, as I closed the door, that those suggestive, peeping, cunning little Turkish slippers encased two beautiful white *bare feet*.

CHAPTER XV.

WINKERS.

Before I plunge deeply into the next few years which embrace my term (let me be frank) as a willing accessory to an association I knew to be illegal and based solely on physical emotions and passions, let me dissertate for a moment upon the two classes that I have found constitute the *personnel* of my fascinating and alluring, yet undoubtedly culpable, profession.

Of this body theatrical I maintain on the basis of twenty years' association, that it is divided into two elements; one part, two-thirds of them deliberate moral transgressors, the other part, one-third, what, for want of a better term, I am forced to call *Winkers*. We are not, as a whole, moral law breakers, but we are at all times, in every situation, silent accessories to sin in others; not only failing to rebuke or condemn it, we even smile and condone, pretending sullenly not to see it and exclaiming vigorously and loudly that it does not exist. In other words we *wink* at it, because, largely, I suppose, in ninety-five cases out of one hundred, it gives us our daily bread. To illustrate, in Mr. Idolized's company were a man and woman, husband and wife, what we call a model couple; of apparently good birth; strictly attentive to their business and their own affairs; reliable in their

work; in fact capable artists both. Yet the actions of their associates were perfect in their eyes. The lady in favor with the management was always "such a dear girl"; the lawless, unfaithful husband who made it possible that their salary came to them every week (through the force of his animal magnetism on a susceptible female public) was a "dear good boy" at all times, no matter how often he changed his mistresses. This wife, a motherly woman, deported herself with great dignity, the husband was of gentlemanly bearing, but with a too patent "trying to please the mighty" air to be exactly pleasant; a sort of subservience to powers that be, an element which smacked of the sleek variety and expressed itself in a constant "Yes, Mr. Idolized"; "No, Mr. Idolized"; "Yes, Miss Merriworld"; "At your service, Miss Merriworld"; which became very irritating even to those whom it was intended to flatter.

This couple is not an isolated case by any manner of means. I found them first bowing to and patronizing "that dear girl Miriam" in a strictly first-class organization, but I have come in contact with the same species even down to the ten, twenty and thirty cent repertoire companies; the same devoted couples, in whom deceit is possibly the largest element of their compositions, each weak in the characteristics that dare to battle for the right and willing to accept the prevailing conditions for the sake of peace and a prosperous season; hiding always behind the very convenient slogan:

"We keep *our* dooryards clean, and that is all that is expected of us."

And it is. I have seen this class of people secretly feeling a very tender regard for some girl in a company but openly ignoring her if she happened to be out of favor with the "powers that be," while they would be sugar and cream to the woman who happened to be running things. These are the people who become wildly indignant if a minister happens to attack the stage from his pulpit. They generally find such report in the daily papers, for they seldom attend church themselves, and expostulate long and loudly on their wish that the minister in question might see what happy, connubial lives they have lived; again they raise the old cry that "the stage is no worse than society and they have proved that it is just as possible to live happy married lives on the stage as anywhere else in the world," etc., ad infinitum, until no one pays any more attention.

The last statement of theirs is quite true; I do not for a moment dispute it. All on earth you have to do is marry some one of your own mental calibre and then both spend your days winking hard or utterly blind and oblivious to what is going on about you. It is a very easy matter to live in a community if you approve of its laws, written or unwritten. Jerome K. Jerome's remark about holding the love of your little nieces and nephews by never reprimanding them, but instead calling them "good little

children" even while they are performing their most diabolical tricks of bad behavior, are only too true of this condition theatrically.

"You may be just as immoral and miserable as you please," the winker says, in his daily actions; "you may oust people from their positions, interfere with their progress in art, if they do not happen to be as tricky as yourself, and I will grin and call you the dearest, cleverest girl, and the man in the case, the most charming and brilliant of fellows, just the same."

This is the attitude which gives the winker his engagement and enables him to keep it with a fair degree of peace and comfort. Sometimes these people get into a bit of hot water while favorites are being changed, from the fact that it is rather hard to tell, at first, which one will win out and stay with the company or which "get her notice." But the winker is nothing if not diplomatic, and he generally manages to be nice to both on the sly, so that when the conqueror comes to her own she really thinks he has been on her side all along. Even my very much admired Mrs. Actwell, whom I consider in her home a noble woman, was a most cheerful and politic winker in spite of the mischief and ruin the transgressors themselves had brought to her life. Let me be charitable, however, for as a winker at that time I felt I had a great and soulful excuse which could not be understood by the common herd, based on my love for Miriam and her convincing faith that

she was obeying a higher law than that which man had made. Undoubtedly other winkers go through various stages of reasoning. They really have in many cases a sincere liking for the sinner who, as a rule, has (or cultivates) a charm of manner and bigness of heart, towards everything, and everybody who does not happen to stand in her way, and wins one in spite of himself. Perhaps the winkers wish, deep in their hearts, that things were different, but as they are not, why not make the best of them? We are none of us perfect, and we know not what temptations assail our fellow creatures which cause them to fall. We know not what we might do if placed under trying circumstances, and no two temperaments are alike; and after all are we fit to be our brother's judge? You see, we religiously avoid the little verse about being "our brother's keeper." Then we have argued ourselves back to the premise that the easiest way is the least trouble and doesn't interfere with salary day.

Winkers are not necessarily confined to the married ones among us. There are single winkers, men and women; people who I believe live fairly upright lives yet who, for some motive which is probably most satisfying to themselves, not only condone offenses in others, but actually give their approval and companionship. Undoubtedly many of us drift into this stage slowly and by such small degrees that we do not even consider ourselves winkers and would indignantly resent such an accusation. Why not?

We gossip about and backbite the transgressors, even while we smile at them and fawn and flatter, and therein we convince ourselves that we are not really approving their conduct, only "being a little politic." Again we content our conscience with the statement that "*I never saw anything wrong about her or him, (as the case may be); as far as I could really swear to anything, they are as pure as the driven snow.*" Thus we blind ourselves and refuse to see, just as I did in Miriam's case, because it is pleasanter not to, and also less dangerous as the winker is nearly always more or less at the mercy of the transgressors.

As a winker, for a year or more, I lived a very illusive and ephemeral existence. I was still the public "cloak of virtue" when the mother and invalid sister were not in evidence, as they were only during the summer months when the man in the case was once more safely ensconced in the bosom of his family in England. As the "cloak of virtue," of the leading lady whom the star adored, I had one privilege never granted to me when I was an ordinary member of the company. I could now escape from the objectionable stories, the ribald jests and high wit of my associates, and my "prudishness" was kindly designated as "eccentricity." Of course, no one of our company believed for a moment I was the model of propriety I was "squibbed to be," but if it pleased management, star, and "bestest own" that I so pose, it was none of their comment, at least not where any of the elect would be likely to hear it.

During our second season I even ventured out to suppers alone with some of the "howling swells" who surrounded us in nearly every city. I did so, at first, from a sense that Miriam would be better pleased if I really did become interested in the Bohemian side of life, instead of merely tolerating it for her sake. In other words, "misery loves company," so, too, do wrongdoers. In fact, it is annoying to them to have people around who are not like themselves;

"Sweet fellowship in shame,
One drunkard loves another of the name,"

says our immortal bard, and I knew well my own mode of living was decidedly distasteful to those at whom I winked and that I was tolerated only because of a certain public usefulness I had as moral guardian.

At these little suppers I indulged in, many were the tales of connubial wretchedness I heard; of longings for a kindred spirit to fill a want the first love and wife had failed to supply. The stories were painfully alike; it seemed to me as I listened to one after another, each phrased and couched in almost the identical language, that the world must simply be swarming with women who, while they were quite able to bear children and to care for them, yet were of a quality, their husbands maintained, which made them no wives nor companions to their souls. This on the side of creating sympathy for the one paying for the supper.

On the other hand, the argument for the much desired affinity sitting opposite, if she belongs to the

world of art and is trying to mount Fame's illusive ladder, is that only people of broad passions ever become great; that tremendous natures, capable of moving a public to frenzy, must have almost violent capacities. Numerous personalities in history are cited to prove the truth of this physical phenomenon: Shelley, Byron, Goethe, Heine, Burns; and on the feminine side, Madame De Stael, Récamier, George Sands, but last and most important of all, George Eliot. Dear woman! I wonder if in her happy hunting ground she knows how often, oh, how often, she is held up as the shining light and glorious example as far as her life with Mr. Lewes is concerned, to the ambitious girl who needs a little help in her climbing. These people, we are told, not only expressed their great emotions in their books, their arts, but also in their daily lives.

The actor especially, then, comes under this thought. His is an emotional existence which must of necessity be fed. His is the school in which he must study and interpret all phases of human joys and sorrows. People who have never felt strong passions cannot depict love in its fullness, etc.

Let me digress enough to say that of all the absurd arguments ever poured into an ambitious girl's ear that is the worst. The very poorest attempt at a performance of "Drink" I ever witnessed was given by a man who was a drunken sot, and the very best impersonation I ever saw was that of a man who seldom, if ever, touched liquor of any kind and who

had never seen a person in delirium tremens. In my own experience it was proverbial of Miss Melloweye, that if she would only refrain from falling in love so much she might be counted upon to give a good performance of almost any part she would be cast for, but as it was she spent so much time and energy in wooing that there was none of the former for study, nor the latter to give to an audience a convincing impersonation. One of the greatest opera prima donnas recently said that she gave so splendid a rendering of a certain character because she never fell in love with her tenor. "If I should lose my heart, so would I likewise lose my head," she sagely remarked.

Some of our very best interpreters of the "Soiled Dove" class of characters, supposedly the most passionate type of heroines, are personally what the world in which they live is pleased to term, "most cold blooded propositions." In fact it would be quite impossible for them to give an adequate definition of the word love. Moreover in this line of argument it is a poor rule which will not work both ways; then I make the statement that some of our sweetest and daintiest ingenues, the unsophisticated type, are women of such vast experience in affairs d'amour that they would make the average stage adventuress, as written by your problem playwright, blush for shame. I have in mind now a young woman who was the most bland and childlike bit of femininity, on the stage, I ever beheld, yet who had three husbands in as many years; each a middle aged man from whom she

managed to obtain a goodly supply of gowns and a bit of cash, only to run off and deliberately supply him with enough evidence to secure half a dozen divorces. If it requires a life devoted to the indulgence of unbridled passions to portray grand emotions properly why not demand of this other line of work the "life guileless"? Yet the very girl I have mentioned was the most convincing stage innocent I have ever seen. Lovy Littledear, while deliberately stealing Ezie Lightheart from his wife, was playing a series of the most immaculate and spotless of sinless maidens and, to judge from her artistic reputation, playing them to perfection.

No, it is not that loose morals termed, for æsthetic veneer, "the emotional temperament," develop talent and make great artists from which springs progress, as these dining seekers of affinities would have us believe; but simply a commonplace statement that people of this kind do not care what they do, nor whom they make use of, so long as they achieve the goal set by personal pride, ambition, and, too often, vanity. The weak nature which takes refuge in tears and hysteria, claiming such outbursts as the result of overwhelming artistic effusiveness, is the temperament which yields most readily to temptation, especially when that element carries with it the promises of attainment.

Just a word of defense for the affinity seeker, and having listened to many a persuasive voice, I think I am competent to make this apology for him. These

men of the world paint beautiful pictures, always in generalities, of the future their money can control; they may make a bid for sympathetic love by a tale of unhappiness and longing for the real companionship of true devotion; they may argue the broadening of one's own nature and life by an absorbing ruling passion; they may use wiles, give beautiful presents, and all sorts of bait and argument, but *always do they give the woman the privilege to propose or signify her wish for the alliance*; not in words, perhaps, but unless she, by a look, a sigh, a sign has given her full and free acquiescence to an association to which these arguments have only been the leading strings, she is a *sacred being*; and I say it with the greatest of conviction. A truly staunch, or properly brought up girl's ruin is seldom accomplished in this way. A girl who is a victim of this kind of man is, in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, a willing one. Grant you that these men are beneath the contempt of honorable, high minded people; they do not, as a rule, commit a crime. When such a man is accused of "trafficking in young girls," I say there are too many young girls anxiously seeking this very ruin which, to them, only spells prosperity and advancement. If traffic there is, then it is mainly in buying goods which are only too plainly for sale. Too many girls go to the great metropolis, burning with the desire to rise and shine in the world of glitter and fine clothes, and they are only too ready to offer their youth and good looks for the purchase of a Bohemian position and some gew-

gaws. And sadder still, there are also too many unscrupulous mothers who bring their daughters well instructed in the art of allurements, to the cities and offer them to the highest bidder. I know fathers, too, who are proud of their daughter's positions obtained in this way, and are often convivial friends of "the man in the case."

Take it from a woman who has herself been in some pretty tight corners and yet who has had the door opened for her and been allowed to pass out into the pure air unharmed and unmolested, since it was her wish. If a girl is of the character strong and invulnerable, the tempting promises of assistance to enable her to attain her dreams of ambition will be withdrawn, and she will find that she must make her own way alone and unaided, and at the same time battle against the woman who will make concessions; that she will be entirely ostracized by these very tempters; that she will be called of the "fish fishy and bloodless," but this kind of name does not sting and wound as those which are too often shouted into the guilty ears of the "flesh fleshy" type, who believes the "broad passion" argument and awakens, too late, to find that all that glitters is not necessarily happiness, and that other people's views of life are not always best to take as our own models.

In the case of Miriam and Mr. Gotrox, she confessed that she "played him," to use her vernacular at that time. In other words, she led him to believe a sea voyage with him would not be distasteful to her,

and he "gambled" the letters of introduction on her promise.

No, I say again, this late supper man, with his money bags, is not the most dangerous obstruction in the way of an ambitious young girl in the world of art. The elements of romance are seldom hovering around his mature head, sitting serenely over some dainty dish and a bottle of wine; nor is he always such a master at the art of love making, as is your *matinée* hero with whom this ambitious girl associates daily. Mr. Moneybags is a danger usually after the grand passion may have been kindled by another, who, while he satisfies her heart for a time, usually is unable to bring fullness to ambition; and so the dining Moneybag is useful, and his arguments are listened to and tucked away; and he is told he is the only one on earth whom she can trust, and the long sought for "soul affinity" is *bought*—at least for a while.

As a winker, even these suppers were empty and void to me. Sometimes I met a man of really brilliant brain, and I would drink in his clever conversation like a thirsty flower. And here I confess it a keen disappointment, that even these men of minds drop one most politely, but firmly, when the subtle and courteous "openings" are passed by or gently closed. I have wondered, oh! so often, if in other walks of life women are only "bodies" to men of minds and weighty intellects. Are they never mental companions? Or do men give all of mind to men and

seek a surcease from intellectual activity in a physical attraction in their association with women? I am sorry it is so, if so, for I have had some very happy conversations with men of brains who, alas, disappeared from my horizon only too soon or treated me with cold, unsociable politeness if I chanced again to be thrown in their way. Like Billie, of my first engagement, they know a good girl when they see one and *they have no use for her*.

I believe I headed this chapter Winkers, and have digressed to a considerable extent. Under the original heading, however, I am reminded now of an incident that for absolute shock, even while I was a culprit, has never been removed from my mind.

In a certain city there is a club composed of literary people, some rich business men, newspaper men, artists, and musicians; all with the Bohemian element largely developed. The object of the club, I believe, is to give quarterly feasts at which are entertained the strolling celebrities of the stage, who may happen to be in town. The annual dinner includes the ladies, wives of the members; and such famous stage beauties who chance to be playing in the city at the time, are the guests of honor.

It so happened that our second season with Mr. Idolized included this city at the time of one of the club's annual feasts, and Miriam was invited as the guest of distinction from our company while I was wedged in, somehow, since the wives and daughters were to be in evidence. Mr. Idolized and several gentlemen

from our company, who were old associates of the club, also attended.

Several theatres were represented by stars and leading men and women, for it is a large city with quite a number of playhouses. Not only dramatic companies sent their best, but the musical comedy and operatic attractions were also represented. A comic opera star had the seat of honor on the left of the president, with one of her chorus girls sitting near; this latter lady escorted thither by the manager of the theatre in which she was playing.

Whether by accident or design, I know not which, Miss "Virtuecloak" was seated next the chaplain of the club. Why this organization should have needed such a commodity as a chaplain I am in utter ignorance; nor will I attempt to explain any more than why Miriam should insist that I stay with her and be squibbed and newspaper articulated, and hold a position of moral preceptress which was decidedly a sinecure, except from the really perverse element in human nature which says: "Let me be as bad as I please, you must think me good." A girl with an upright companion would naturally be considered of excellent character; likewise, a club with a chaplain must necessarily stand for nothing, if not decency and upright deportment.

However, there he was; the chaplain, one of the handsomest men, I think, I have ever seen; of a spiritual temperament; lithe and straight of physique; a slender pale face from which shone starlike black

eyes; and a perfect shock of rich black curls slightly touched with gray at the temples. We were soon very "chummy" and talked church for sometime, then I remarked:

"You must belong to quite a new school of progress and advancement to lend your clerical presence to—er—well to us."

"Some people are pleased to call me progressive," he said with a sweet, kindly smile; "but I prefer to think I am, like my brothers, merely human. I cannot see why a clergyman should build a little wall of austerity and reserve about himself and call to the publicans and sinners to keep their distance. Not," he added and the smile became more kindly and nobler, "that I consider people of your world as coming under the head of either of these Biblical offenders."

"You are very good," I murmured though I felt the blood was surging to my cheeks. I did not look in Miriam's direction.

"Take yourself, for instance," he continued, "I am told you are a girl of very high principles and lofty thought. I can readily believe it after seeing you," and his beautiful dark eyes seemed to reach my very soul in great admiration as he looked beamingly at me. I know I was crimson now. I was miserably, woefully conscious that this statement was not true. I the condoner; I the accessory to sin, to dare to pose

as a being of "lofty thought and high principles" to this man. It seemed as if he must see my guilty heart, but he did not, and I felt that I would welcome a trap in the floor which would hurry me out of his sight. I looked stealthily into his great dark eyes, alight with earnestness and spiritual fervor, and that great roomful of people seemed to fade away into space while I felt only a wild longing to throw myself at his feet; such a desire as the Magdalen might have had in the presence of the Saviour, and pour out my sin, my wicked, wicked sin, living as I was in an atmosphere of vice, garnished and succulent though it be, gilded and painted with the deceit of "highest ideals and broader thoughts"; vice none the less, and unrebuked by me, who took its crumbs with as much duplicity as any other Pharisee. Mr. Chaplain, if never in your life before nor since, you stood at that one moment of your clerical existence as your Master bade you—His mortal, moral agent to bring a sinner to repentance. The light of the room grew dim to me, sounds surged in my ears, and I saw only those eyes, so black, so beautiful which I felt were searching my soul—my immortal self till even they seemed to fade, and a great light took their place. I was sick and faint with the travail of repentance, and I hungrily waited for this physician of the soul to deliver my pent-up, choking confession.

Then—his voice was coming to me at first from far away.:

"Yes, I am very, truly very, fond of your people. There is a lighthearted openness about you all, a good fellowship which is very appealing."

I could distinguish the electric bulbs in the room now.

"If, at times, some of you seem to stray by the wayside, you are so openly frank about it one can hardly find it in his heart to chide. I like to mingle with you, as it were, for I feel in your atmosphere is no hypocrisy, and as I have known many of you intimately, I also consider you a very much maligned people. At all events I am very happy to call you friends."

The lights, table, wine glasses, room and people, the comic opera star, and the chorus girl, all were clear to my vision now. I looked at Miriam smiling, and beamingly entertaining a man of letters who, only the evening before, had been telling me, as he was now probably telling her, the "loveless home and hungry heart" story. Again my eyes rested on the comic opera star, who, we all knew, was spending a race horse man's money at the rate of fifty thousand dollars a year; once more I looked at the girl from the chorus, who receiving eighteen dollars a week salary, had, in sight, on her hands and neck, enough jewels to satisfy a royal princess. Then I saw the manager who escorted her to the dinner; one of the most notorious roués in the city, and my eyes wandered around that table to the several women from other companies, not one of whom but had her

"affairs," and one in fact escorted to this dinner and, quite as a matter of course, introduced by the married man, a citizen of great wealth and prominence who was accounted her "backer" and "friend." Not even a winker of our fraternity did I see, for as a rule they are seldom invited out unless it be that they are useful, as in my case.

Yes, surely, we were a charming lot. None of us hypocrites, all beautifully open hearted children of nature. It was really kind of a clergyman to like us. But, of course, Miss Guiltygirl, *he* didn't know our histories, and mechanically I kept repeating "to the pure all things are pure" until I began rather to believe it. It must be so indeed.

But some way the halo my admiring thoughts had lifted over this man's head at the beginning of our conversation, seemed to have become askew on his beautiful curls, and I felt a slight shock of realization that, after all, he was rather a commonplace, if not a bit obtuse, sort of man. However, he sweetly gurgled on of our virtues, our ennobling and uplifting art; of what a privilege it must be to deliver *our* sermons in such an æsthetic atmosphere, which embraced all arts; that of reading, picture, voice, and motion; for in reality the mission of the theatre was to be a preacher unto the people and give them their lessons, while they least suspected they were being lectured; in sugar coated pellets so to speak.

I asked him, at this point, if he belonged to the Association for the Union of Church and Stage.

"Oh, yes," he said brightly, "I am one of the charter members."

So was Miss Melloweye, if you remember. I asked if he knew her.

"Stella Melloweye? Indeed I do, well," he went on enthusiastically, "and a dear, lovely girl she is too."

Well, that was all right, Stella could easily tell *him* she didn't know what bread and butter was. His halo was dreadfully lopsided by now.

"Are you a member of the Association?" he asked me. I said, "No," and he continued urgently:

"Ah, but you really must join—not that *you* need it perhaps," some way the smile did not seem sweet nor kindly any more, "but we do need all the good workers we can get."

"There are some people who belong to it of whom I do not approve," I was foolish enough to remark.

"Nonsense," he laughed, "do you know that is exactly what my dearest friend in the profession, Mr. Scrapegrace, said when I asked him to join. 'Chaplain,' he said, 'there are people in that Association that it would be worth my reputation for me to be connected with.' Wasn't it droll?"

It certainly was. If he had dashed the wine from the loving cup which was now making its rounds, into my face, I could hardly have gasped for breath more chokingly. He had mentioned the name of a man whose fame as an actor was only equaled by his infamy as a man; whose life was at that time being raked over in every newspaper in the land in

connection with a most cruel case of a beautiful young girl who had died from the result of a criminal operation for which he was responsible, and he had recently been compelled to pay her family a large sum of money, his price for their daughter's virtue and life.

The halo fell to the floor and smashed into a thousand pieces and before me sat a black robed, black eyed, black haired, good looking, physical, common, every day, contemptible WINKER; nothing more; nothing less.

Build a wall of austerity and reserve about himself? Well, I should say not. I felt that I could gladly play foot ball with his black coated worldly personality and not ruffle my own dignity in the least. Talk about the fall of Lucifer! This man, in his own words and conversation, fell, in the estimation of a sinner, somewhat further than from Heaven to earth.

Dear, good, men of the cloth, if you value yourselves and your calling, please, *please* inquire if we are taking your hands in meekness and repentance, if we come to you with contrite sincere hearts, before you try to make chums of us. Believe me, even we will think better of you for it.

CHAPTER XVI.

"A CHANGE CAME O'ER THE SPIRIT OF MY DREAM."

As insidiously as had the conditions of tranquillity, born of the atmosphere of Bob's and Miriam's attachment crept upon us, so now began to steal the spirit of unrest. In looking back over the four eventful seasons, I can no more define the place, date, nor circumstance which marks the line from whence began the descent from these heights of voluptuous unconsciousness, than I can read the meaning of those supposed canals on the planet Mars. What is more, no other personality interfered, as in the case of Miss Prettystyle; therefore, it is even harder to account for the gradual decay of things beautiful or to attribute it to any definite change in conditions.

I was not a witness to Miriam's and Bob's first quarrel; nor to their second, nor possibly their third. They kept them well in the background for a time, and I only remember of becoming slowly, haltingly conscious that both were having moods; hers those of indignant sulks; his, little evidences of the old brutality to members of the company. This would last sometimes for days, then both would appear beaming and smiling; she radiant as the morning, he foolishly exuberant and doing all sorts of silly things

like a great school boy. Then the mental note went round that "they had made it up," and the winkers fluttered about them both and basked in the light of their joys.

Even this condition developed slowly, and such incidents were, at first, most infrequent, having their first inception early in the second season and then lying quite dormant until the end of that theatrical year. In the meantime Miriam reigned a queen, much photographed and written about by our press agent in magazines, always telling the wonderful story of winning her laurels by a hard and patient apprenticeship, making a new hit each year, in fact an established factor in her chosen art. She was even more largely feted and dined in various cities, always taking me along when the invitation came from families of club men and rich Bohemians, though why this was necessary, even then, is one of the great enigmas, as on several occasions at house or yachting parties I have seen actresses entertained by the wives and daughters of the very men who, "he who runs might read" were these actresses' backers.

The third season the whirlwind began to gather force. Three new plays were tried that year; two of them having failed, the third lasted the latter half of the season. Each new production meant rehearsals, gowns, and all the work and worry which is usually gone through with but once a year. Perhaps all this, together with the financial loss which always attends the failure of a play when the public persists in staying

away from the theatre, got on Bob's nerves. I know not. I only do know that by the time we had started to rehearse the third piece, after the second failure of the season, we were all of us, as members of the company, nearly in hospitals with nervous prostration from the absolutely fiendish brutality of our erstwhile lamblike star.

Our rehearsals carried on daily, while we were playing at night, were five, sometimes six hours of (speaking metaphorically) pyrotechnical displays of temper wild and furious. Sarcasm ran riot. Scenes were stopped on more than one occasion that we might all hear some actor, who had offended, sarcastically held up to our view as "the rottenest excuse of a cheat it had ever been his misfortune to meet. Why in — did he ever seek the stage? Only to torment this suffering angel trying to direct a play? "—, if ever this sufferer committed a sin (which he firmly believed he never did), if here isn't a devil created to punish me for it. Ladies and gentlemen," continuing, "this man cannot even read the Queen's English. He is an impostor, a 'mut,' a saphead, fool," and much more in the same strain until he was quite exhausted.

Not men alone, but the women came under the same brilliant display of vituperative fireworks only as they usually could stand it for but two or three minutes before the hysteria of almost cracking nerves sent them into a torrent of tears, they escaped usually with shorter, though not less severe tirades. One

young miss was called "a thief, a down right thief. You steal my time," she was informed, "my valuable time, trying to put some brains into that addle pate of yours. You might just as well put your hands in my pockets and take the currency coined by the United States. You are just as great a thief as if you did so." And when this girl, who was an exceedingly sensitive little thing, unable to bear the humiliation (which comes from the knowledge that every eye in the company is on you, every ear listening intently), fainted at his feet he flew into a deeper passion and roared and stormed that "now of course that little white livered fool would get all the sympathy, and he would be considered a brute, when by — — — and all the angels and apostles he was doing his best to be patient and kind."

How we did stand about, straining every nerve and energy to pay attention, to do our utmost, each hoping blindly to escape a personal outburst only to be browbeaten at last from some slip caused purely through such a sense of fear and trepidation it was quite impossible at times for one to tell what he really was about! How Mr. Oldwinker, he of the matronly wife, would jump about; exactly like a hen on a hot griddle, putting every one on edge with his incessant "Yes, Mr. Idolized"; "No, Mr. Idolized"; "As you wish, Mr. Idolized"; really inviting the temper-tossed Idolized to kick him, for which act I veritably believe this cringing individual would have turned and thanked him.

This attitude of our star continued even in the evening performances, for he very considerably (?) stood in the wings to tell us each and all, as we would make an exit, that we were "rotten! disgraceful! no wonder no one came to the theatre; why should they want to see such school children try to act?" We were almost to a man the same "school children" who had been with him for three years and business had been good prior to this season; however, I never remember in our prosperous years of hearing him remark that the public ever came to see any member of his company. This body of servants had nothing whatever to do with his successes, but they and they alone, were responsible for his failures.

The best description of the condition we were living in at the theatre during this time I ever heard, was given by one of the stage hands. A company which happened to be in the tranquil, or turtle dove state, rehearsed some times at the hours we did not, on our stage, and this wise "grip" of canvas and paint very sagely remarked, as the other company gaily filed out of the theatre: "There goes Heaven," and as we slowly, mournfully "sneaked" in, seeking dark corners, anxious to avoid as long as possible the "sky rockets"; "and be gorry, here comes Hell."

At first Miriam was exempt from all this. Her scenes were rehearsed in quiet dignity, but I knew very well that she was naturally of too lovable a disposition not to feel keenly Bob's attacks on others. Many times I heard her gently arguing with him to

control himself better, while he made all sorts of excuses to appear as of old in her eyes.

"I'm terribly harassed," he would say; "my season is going to the financial bow-wows, and the firm get so nasty when business goes below a certain mark. They (meaning the company) don't realize how much I have on my mind, and they seem to try themselves to see how stupid they can be."

"But you scare them nearly to death, Bob," Miriam would say, trying to be cheerful, "and how can people exhibit brain qualities when their teeth are chattering and their knees knocking together from fear?"

"That's just it," he would whine like a pettish child, "I am not a great bugaboo, yet they like to make out I am. I try to be patient, but they are enough to exasperate a saint, and when I am a little firm with them, they fall into a fit, and, of course, I am a brute, a fiend and all the awful things in the world. And it is not so, I do not ever have to yell at you, do I?"

She was compelled to say he never did.

"Well, that's because you exhibit some intelligence and pay attention when I tell you anything once."

"I'm sure the others try to do so," she said loyally, "you didn't have this trouble last season."

"No," he whined, "and that's what makes it so exasperating. When the season is running smoothly and business is good, they are like lambs gamboling on the green of my prosperity. But let me have a little financial set back and worry, and they stampede like a herd of buffaloes."

He firmly believed this. We were all in league against him to torment him, simply because he had not been as successful as of yore.

Miriam's bed of roses made her fairly comfortable, even in this turmoil, and she did her best to try to deaden the wounded senses of her fellows with luxurious drafts of perfume from her leafy and savory existence; but I soon began to notice the signs of nerves wrought to a tension and sympathies aroused to a dangerous point in her.

The whirlwind was gathering strength.

One day, when Idolized had come to a point of rage where he began to jump up and down and screamed like a child, Miriam went to him and, putting her hand on his arm, said gently:

"Bob! Bob!"

He stopped for a minute to look at her, then shaking her hand from his arm, said roughly, though with a most evident effort to be pleasant:

"Now, Miriam dearest, don't you try to interfere. I'm running this stage."

"I know, Bob," she persisted gently, "but it has really gone far enough; we are all tired and hungry, and I think we had better stop, anyway."

"How dare you?" he cried. "Well, things are coming to a pretty pass when my leading lady dictates to me what I shall do. That's it, that's always the way. Put a beggar on horseback. There you are. Now I'm getting it right in the neck," and he began to pace up and down like an angry lion.

"Bob!" she muttered under her breath, while her face became scarlet, "please remember where you are."

"*You* remember where *you* are," he roared, stopping in front of his table and bringing his fist down upon it with a bang, "and that you are a member of my company, nothing more. I pay you a salary, don't I? Well, perhaps I pay it for you to mind your own business. You go and sit down. I'm directing this rehearsal." Then, lifting his voice to a shout, he called to his assistant stage manager, who was standing but a few paces from him: "Smart! Smart, see that Miss Merriworld keeps her place even if she is my l-e-a-ding lady," with infinite acrimony, "and call that scene over again. Gray, begin with your entrance, and we will go over the whole act from the beginning as if we had not been interrupted."

Miriam left the theatre instantly, and our star pretended to take no notice of the fact. Rehearsal progressed without her, Smart reading her lines when it came to her scenes, and, strange as it may seem, harmony reigned. Idolized went off with his business manager, "the firm's" representative, after he dismissed us, and at the evening performance we were painfully conscious that he had been drinking with anything but discretion.

When I reached the hotel after rehearsal, I went at once to Miriam's room. She was pacing the floor as Bob did the stage, like a caged and angry animal, her eyes ablaze; two bright red spots on her cheeks.

"I wonder how long he thinks I'll stand for such an exhibition as that," she cried without even greeting me, as I closed the door, and quite as if she had been talking in this strain to herself for the last hour. Then she stopped abruptly and demanded to know what he had said when she left.

"Nothing whatever of you, nor the incident," I answered truthfully, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

"I think he must be going insane," she commented.

We, of the company, thought he *had* gone long ago, but this was Miriam's first public taste of his diabolical disposition. Then I had to tell her how he acted and where he had gone after rehearsal.

"Well, he will go down on his knees to me before I'll forgive him for this," she stormed. "I'll send my resignation to Bigbunch; he mustn't think *I* am a poor little nobody to be treated in such a manner as that. I happen to have a position in the profession. He can't bulldoze me," and the pacing began again.

She "had a position in the profession." Indeed she had; no month of the year, but her picture was in some magazine; no city in the United States, but some one paper, each day, had a squib regarding her movements. She was considered one of the highest salaried leading women in the profession. At least, so she was advertised. I never asked her what her salary was. She always had plenty of money and beautiful clothes, she was in fact Some-

body. But to what did she owe it? Not to her talent and earnest, hard, honest efforts. Far from it. She never worked, nor studied. Idolized coached her in each character she played, and she had not even the trouble of working out the proper inflections of voice, nor seeking the subtle thoughts of the author. All this Bob did. It was his pleasure. He always knew, by an inspiration which must have been born in him, better than any one about him, what was dramatically effective, and Miriam had been quite willing to rest on his superior experience. Hers was a life of play and holiday foolery, not work. In other words, she had been lying on "flowery beds of ease" when she should have been striving to win the prize (to finish the old hymn) by "sailing through bloody seas." All she was at that moment, she owed to the man who had just now caused her unrest. And yet she would give him to understand distinctly *she* had a position which would not brook his intolerable treatment.

Three days of icy cold politeness continued between these two, but we benefited by it, for he was too much of the injured gentleman to lose his temper now. He would show the company which had been to blame. Then he gradually began to thaw. Not so her ladyship. She had sent her resignation to "the firm," and they had promptly turned it over to Idolized to use his own pleasure in accepting or rejecting it.

He came to the hotel on the third day of the frost, and, as I knew my cue to disappear, I am sorry to say I cannot record the scene which followed. However, as this was not intended to be a love story, but a plain statement of some facts as they came into my life, perhaps it is just as well.

What apologies Bob made, if he went down on his knees to make them, as Miriam had declared he should do, I know not. All I can personally vouch for is that two turtle doves were never more coo-y than these strange people at the theatre that evening, which happened to be, not a performance, but a dress rehearsal of the new play; that he acted like a six year old "foolish boy" and "sweet hearted" and "dearied" her while she asked his permission for every little move she made, prefixing it with "dearie" or "darling" and taking the attitude of a willing, loving little slave to a great, generous, goodly king.

Fortunately, for us, the new piece achieved some degree of success, and our season ended in, if not exactly the old harmony, at least a smoldering quietness, which, while not wholly restful (owing to an unseen yet strongly felt insecurity) at all events saved the majority of us from applying to Bloomingdale for admission for the summer.

CHAPTER XVII.

“AND FOR THIS HAVE I SINNED.”

I almost regret for the sake of a true elucidation of the psychological changes which took place in Miriam's attachment for Bob Idolized that this much of my narrative must necessarily be delivered from the observations of a third person. Gladly would I unfold the slow degrees by which this change came on; the effect on heart and mind as the realization must have evolved that the air bubble was breaking. I can only record the outward result of the inward struggle, whatever it was, and, be that conflict what it may, it wrote indelibly, with potent force, one word upon a brow which had been, a short time ago, serene and joyous and that word, in capital letters, spelt SUFFERING.

I believe that both fought madly to cling to that corporal fascination in which they had found a day dream's happiness. I also think that the natural separation would have come about long before it did but for a physical attraction which seemed to hold them in a hypnotic vice even while they despised each other.

I explain Bob Idolized's attitude and dismiss it solely on the demonstrated fact that he did not like to eat chocolate cake when he had had too much of it. He was used to changing his diet whenever it suited

him to do so, and four or five years was the allowable limit to him for one variety of fare. And, since he lived only to please himself, the change must be made when he was ready for it. Miriam was as sweet a girl in manner, looks, and temperament when he began to weary of her, as she had been when he first won her heart; yet she had ceased to be charming to him.

As to this girl, she loved the man devotedly until he wounded her vanity. Then he was no longer a divinely perfect being in her sight. He might abuse others, and she could find excuses for him, but when he became a mere brutal man to her, as an ideal he slipped from his pedestal, and the first step towards disillusion was taken since he had lost what she considered her respect. From then on the way of the whirlwind was clear. Things small, unimportant, forgivable before, now became mountains out of which to pick a quarrel. Our fourth season must have been a repetition of Miriam's first, when Miss Prettystyle was being dethroned, as the "bestest own," with the exception, as I before stated, that no third party happened this time to intervene; at least not in the theatre, for Bob would pointedly, after some fierce set-to of words, give a box for one of the performances, to some notorious woman and deliberately drive off with her after the play was over, making quite sure not to start until just as Miriam was leaving for her hotel, so that she could not possibly avoid seeing him.

To try to enumerate the thousand and one despicable implements of torture this man brought into the girl's life the last year of their association, would be almost an impossibility. There were things probably trivial enough in themselves, but they were delivered with such diabolical, ignoble desire to wound and torment. But the strangest of all psychological reasoning is that he suffered quite as keenly in being the tormentor as did his tantalized victim. I do not believe that from the time his passion for Miriam began to wane he ever saw a happy moment; not from the fact that he sorrowed over the dying bliss, but because he seemed obsessed with a cruel desire to cause her a measure of misery which must far outweigh any happiness their association might have brought her.

Miriam was a spirited girl and did not bear her cross with any too great an amount of patience. Hence the violent quarrels which ensued, now publicly, at least so far as the company was concerned, for they spared each other not at all. The effect of their attitude upon the rest of us was chaotic in the extreme. The wingers were in a constant state of uncertainty as to whether it was policy still to fawn upon the falling queen or "make a hit" with the king by openly ignoring the disfavored one. Most of them took the latter course, and where they had flattered and bowed before, they were only coldly polite from then on until she was finally down and vanquished.

I now saw her almost wisdom in having clung to me. I alone remained with her to the last for what else should I have done? I owed my four years of prosperity to her, and she had always been to me, in manner, a dear, good sister. I had loved her when we struggled together that little while so long ago; she had persuaded me to admire and love her as an adolescent sinner, and I loved her no less now in her fall; while she clung to me wildly, passionately as her one crumb of comfort. I cannot dwell, now, with tearless eyes upon the sleepless hours I spent trying to palliate her heart breaking groans and violent sobs. We are a nervously erratic sort of people, we artists, at best. With an amplified emotional keenness we enjoy the goods the gods may bestow, but in the same quality and quantity do we suffer. No argument, no philosophy will make the situation seem to us any the less awful than that which we conjure up through eyes often of strained, impetuous, vehement exaggeration.

So Miriam suffered. If she had reached the heights of an æsthetic heaven in "sowing the wind," she now surely touched the depths of the natural abode of Belial in "reaping the whirlwind."

From remorse? *Never*. Not for one moment was that a part of her punishment. In looking back on these misery laden souls, as I have seen them, I declare it with full conviction, remorse is seldom a factor in this bitterness. I think remorse would be almost a sweet sorrow compared to that which these

sinner bear. Theirs comes purely and simply from a natural sequence of events; the inevitable tottering of the house built on sand. These people fling all reason to the winds and plunge into their air castles regardless of any restraining voice or creature whom they may trample in their mad rush; heeding only the call of their own selfish desires. In their first plunge they sow the very seeds which afterwards grow and consume them; for this quality of character which indulges itself in spite of God, man, or devil has in it the same elements which eventually turn upon even the once desired object of its lust and rend it as mercilessly as it has all else that may have stood in the way of selfish, greedy sensuality.

We winkers, when we see the myriad of Miriams writhing in the throes of mental agony, say with a shrug of our clean (?) shoulders:

"Well what could she expect? She took him from another woman. She might have known if he would tire of one, he would of another."

As to the man, we invariably exclaim: "Why, everybody knows what he is, and if a woman is fool enough to trust him when her eyes are wide open, she deserves all she gets."

That he suffers, too, from his own nefarious conduct we do not acknowledge, for we naturally reason that he surely would not act as he does if it made him miserable. But it does; believe me, truly, it does. He cannot tell you why, nor can I, yet he suffers as from the stabs of a two edged sword. Whenever

he sends forth a spurt of his venomous nature it is a boomerang in its effect. The very malignant desire to cause pain is more mental anguish than can possibly be conveyed to the victim. Believe me ah, believe me, it is infinitely better to be the tormented than the tormentor. I have lived with both, and I know; I know!

The climax to all this luxurious pampering to self, this utter disregard of the conventionalities of our moral laws or the rights of others, was truly terrible, and I know must have wrung the hearts of even the most hardened of wingers. The Bigbunch naturally took their "cue" from their star, and realizing another season would mean another leading woman, nearly all press work for Miriam was stopped, and she was allowed to slip into the background like any other unadvertised member of the company. Even I no longer figured as the "cloak of virtue" and held my position, possibly because I was harmless, interfered with no one, and because I was useful in playing my part to the satisfaction of the star.

This gradual dropping of Miriam from the public's attention seemed to gall her most of all. Such a condition comes under the head of business and necessitates the explanation that to an actor, so far as the public is concerned, "there is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is *not* being talked about," which, being interpreted, means that in order to be anybody or anything in the public's estimation we must, as a notorious

French actress puts it: "Advertise! Advertise! toujours advertise!" It is so easy to forget a name or a face once the black letters or pictures are removed from one's sight, especially when there are so many other names and pretty pictures to see.

Such an action, on the part of "the firm," was the subject of many of the violent quarrels between Miriam and Bob, and he always coldly denied all knowledge of their motives; except to tell her that it was possibly because her work was getting to be so utterly impossible, for a first-class company, that Bigbunch undoubtedly felt that the less attention attracted towards her from the public the better it would be for business.

How much more humane it would have been had he only let her go, even if in the middle of the season, as he had Miss Prettystyle, but no, he must keep her near to tantalize and torture her as a cat does a mouse, for there was no one in the company now to take *her* place, and he still kept up a half hearted love making which had the same effect upon her that the mouse experiences when the cat allows it to creep a few inches away from its paws in a fluttering, faint hopefulness that perhaps after all its life is to be spared.

Bob had been quite attentive and peaceful just before the final breaking of the storm, even taking us for a drive one afternoon and at night not leaving Miriam's rooms until the wee small hours. A little of the old radiance seemed to be coming back to her face

when she entered the theatre the next day for the *matinée*.

I stopped in her dressing room with her a moment, as was my custom, and on her dressing table lay the weekly papers of the city in which we were playing. We took them up, as usual, to see what our notices were, and I was busy with a copy of "Gossip" when a cry from Miriam startled me so I grasped the paper she let fall and anxiously asked:

"What is it?"

She did not answer me, and as her face became ashen white I mechanically read the squib which had evidently caused the outcry. The paper itself was a scurrilous sheet, printed weekly, as gossipy tittle-tattle for "society," and this bit of an article seemed to be a delicious morceau and to the effect, from "someone in the know," that "Bob and Miriam (the first names only were used) must really be wearying of one another; where, for several seasons, audiences had been able to gaze on stage love scenes which even he who runs might read were the genuine article, so pungent and convincing were they, these same moments had now become quite tame and devoid of all realism."

It was the first time, in four years, that even a hint had ever appeared in a paper other than that Miriam was a model of virtue and propriety. I knew, none so well as I, that no sting could be to her as great as this. She was more jealous of her public reputation as a woman than she was of it as an artist, and this

bit of "cold type" was cutting deeper than anything she had as yet experienced. Foolishly, blindly, wild with the humiliation of it, she rushed into Bob's dressing room, which was next hers, and thrusting the paper before him began inconsistently and unreasonably to accuse him of being its instigator.

"Give the devil his due." This was not the case in the slightest degree. Nor do I think the press agent of Bigbunch was the author of it. It was really a random shot of a paper with no standing and which knew it could not be taken to task for its opinion. Yet when Bob indignantly denied it, Miriam kept persisting that he had promised from the first to protect her good name and that it meant as much to him as to her. What would his wife think if she should see such an article? That proposition seemed to him very droll, and he laughed heartily and called her a silly girl. But she still railed; her wounded vanity apparently seeking a vent in some kind of scene.

At first he rather petted and cooed at her (we could hear them through the thin partitions), then when she refused to be comforted that way, the storm began to rise in him and he stoutly denied any hand in the affair, any knowledge of it. Anon he violently denied and she more violently railed, their voices rose higher and higher. Some of the men along the hall came to their doors, uncertain what would happen next. Finally she excitedly declared that "he might torture her as he had been doing for months, might

rob her of her reputation as an artist and place her back on the rung of the ladder upon which he had found her, but he must not, *should not*, rob her of her good name. That she would fight for, till death," she almost screamingly avowed.

"What in the name of — — are you talking about?" he roared, his voice thundering above hers as a lion's might above a wildcat's. "Get the — out of here. I'm trying to dress. *Your* good name, forsooth. When in the name of all that's reasonable did you ever have one. You know you're a — — — and so does everybody else. What in — are you kicking about?"

She must have sprung at him with the screech of rage we heard, for there was a scuffle of just an instant, his door opened, and he threw her violently into the hall, slamming the door again in her face. She did not fall, only staggered blindly against the opposite wall. Then steadying herself, she began beating her fists against his door until the blood ran from them, shouting and screaming the most frightful oaths I ever heard from the mouth of any human being.

She was mad; stark, staring, wildly, violently insane. I knew it then. The pent-up sin-tortured soul had burst its bounds in this raving fury. If his door had not been locked, she would have killed him as surely as there was a sky above them. I rushed to her and tried to drag her away, but she turned on me like a tigress and drew blood from the

many scratches she made on my hands and arms. I called to some of the stage hands, who had gathered to the scene, to help her to her room. It took three of these great stalwart fellows to drag her those few feet, she fighting and screaming every step of the way. But overwrought nature snapped as she reached the door, and she fell unconscious to the floor as they were attempting to place her in a chair.

They lifted her, and one of the boys wheeled in a couch from the stage furnishings and placed her upon it. *Not one man of the company came near to offer assistance*, although all watched the proceeding from their various doorways. Idolized now made his appearance in a bath robe and sent for a physician. His only thought was that she must revive in time for the performance. We worked for an hour trying to bring her back to consciousness, when the doctor declared it was a catalepsy from which she might not recover for days. There was nothing to do, but to remove her to her hotel and give the performance without her.

I played her rôle that afternoon and night, and Bob was the essence of sweet clover honey to me. I was "the dearest little girl in the world to help him out and really gave a most clever performance, etc.," and flattered and petted me, so that, had I not already summered and wintered him, I too, then, might have thought his strong arms and caressing voice "the prettiest little parlor that ever I did spy." But my heart was with the unconscious girl only a few

blocks away, and when he played our love scenes in the old way that "he who runs might read" and which I understood only too well, I could not refrain from smiling at the very narrow vision of a conceited man whom women have undoubtedly encouraged in believing that there are none who can resist him, not even one who knew him in all his weakness.

Poor Miriam! As I sat by her bed all that night, vainly watching for a sign of consciousness, the events of our lives since we met kept passing before me like a huge, slowly moving panorama. That she had been a good woman when I met her, I never doubted, nor do I think otherwise now. That her relations with this man should have been what they were, I could account for by examining my own experiences and realizing how insidiously and subtly sin creeps upon us by false reasoning and wrong ideals, nurtured in an atmosphere of respected and obeyed licentiousness, where none rebuke the transgressor, but contrarywise, assert that such error is the only way to fame and happiness. And I wish to say, in justice to some winkers who may have felt constrained to give a girl a kindly bit of advice, that, as a rule, the sneer which rewards such an effort, the absolute defiance with which the offender barricades herself behind the "cast the first stone" and "judge not that ye be not judged" sections of Holy Writ, literally challenging the adviser to dare to set herself, or himself, up as a Christ, is discouraging in the largest degree. The contempt and scorn also visited upon

the head of this "meddlesome adviser" by the *man* in the case is one of the hardest crosses a person can take upon himself, and, of course, few of us are seeking trouble, especially in the service of others.

I know that even had I told Miriam that night, when she first confessed her "romance," that I saw this outcome for it, had I told her she was building her castle upon the sands of a dissolute character, she would not only have refused to believe me, but she would have silenced me as being woefully uncharitable in that I would not acknowledge a man could change and be a better being if only the right woman guided him.

As she lay there as one dead, save for a wearied moan which now and then escaped her, the lofty, high arguments which excused the "unconventional" in her æsthetic bliss, came pounding through my brain.

"I love! I love! I have a right to love. I am supremely happy."

A right at any cost, at any price. Yet now alas, to-day, that price she paid.

And to-night I answered her mentally over those four years of watching at the birth, growth, and death of that unholy passion;

As Patience sings:

"If love is a weed that stings and smarts,
Then why do you wear it next your hearts?"

If the life of morals sound or morals lax is only the matter of opinion, or the way one chooses to view it, why this inexorable law, not made by man, of

suffering, of soul torturing hysteria which laid this poor girl upon her bed in a state of catalepsy. If to "sow the wind" is only a matter of one point of view, why do disease and degeneration come tumbling headlong with "the whirlwind"?

Miriam's white, still face gave me no answer. These laws, not made by man, she had defied in her imagined happiness, and they had laid her low.

Again the little devils bombarded my ears to-night:

"He has a wife. He has a wife," and I smiled this time, a sad yet sympathetic smile, to that little woman across the seas. *She* at least had found a solace in her children; so much had a legal tie done for her, no matter how prosaic and unæsthetic we may wish to argue it. And he, the man who had tortured this white victim now before me into unconsciousness, would stand by that legal claim, which he had contended was so galling in his wooing of "the other woman," stand by it and his wife before the world and in reality, while this poor creature, no greater sinner than himself, must go down and out of his life since the tie which bound them had no master behind it to compel him to do his duty. On his selfish lust alone lay "the other woman's" claims to his care, and that had already burnt itself to ashes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME OTHER MIRIAMS.

That I have given you Miriam's history thus far in considerable detail, must not be taken as showing her as one individual who happened to sin and suffer in seeking fame.

Summing up my twenty years spent in these surroundings, collectively considering the many women I have met (and my acquaintance is a large one for during my connection with Miriam alone we were constantly associating with all the "higher lights," exchanging performances, suppers, and companionship) I assert that in all these groups the majority were women of the genus so pertinently described by Dumas as "the order of specked peaches." Yet while the "worm i' the bud" was kept almost always zealously from the public, it was none the less known to us. We never fooled one another, although it rather pleased us to imagine we did; for I remember on one occasion a charming girl, whose dainty personality is one of the most admired on the stage to-day, leaving a luncheon party given by one of our women's clubs with the remark that "her angel mamma had asked her to return early"; and I recall the smile that almost simultaneously came to our lips, though no word was spoken, as we recollected that the

wedding of that "angel mamma" to a paramour of many years had only recently been announced as a future possibility, and that in the room sat a woman who had boarded in the house at one time with this girl and the "angel mamma" and had often seen the latter walking up and down the halls unable to keep warm in her hall bed room, while the daughter was entertaining her manager in the best room in the house.

Even after I left Miriam my connection with other managers, and other companies brought over and over, as history repeating itself, the same exhibitions of suffering as I had watched that year in her, so that I have come to look upon her as a type only, a composite development of the element in which she lived; this element which apparently promises a mountain of glory, happiness, and comfort, yet which gives a fulfillment of misery and discontent.

Miriam suffered. From the moment of that tempestuous outbreak in Bob Idolized's dressing room, she never again knew a moment's peace, serenity, nor contentment. Gayety, mirth, dissipation perhaps, but happiness—never. Yet she was not alone in this. If I were to try to cite all cases I have met, personally, on a par with hers, taking the detail of each, I could write several volumes which, when finished, would all tell the same story, all have the same characteristics, only interpreted by different personalities, just as we might put new casts in the same play season after season.

In one company I was with, some years after the events recorded in the last chapter, we had a girl with us who, while receiving the very munificent sum of fifteen dollars a week for playing small parts, used to appear at the theatre every few days in a new tailor made suit, or carriage gown costing many times her one week's salary. One of the managers of the theatre was one of her patrons, but not the only one. No. She must not only work at his theatre for a pittance and be at his command, but also seek her clothes and living from others. This beautifully gowned creature was one of the most miserable women I ever had the misfortune to meet. I have seen her throw herself on the floor of her dressing room, screaming and tearing her hair with hysteria which lasted often for hours until it became necessary to give her an opiate to quiet her. What would lead up to this outbreak, of course, I know not for she was not the part of my daily life that Miriam had been, but I have heard her hardened sisters often berating her for "being such a fool as ever to take a man seriously," and I judged from that that she sometimes was so unguarded as to fall in love with some man to whom she was merely a convenience. She spent much of her time in hospitals with the result that her physical strength was taxed to its extreme limit, and she was compelled to consume alcoholic stimulants in enormous quantities to keep herself alive and about. She is now drinking herself to death, which is quite the wisest thing she can do,

from her material point of view, to end her misery as quickly as possible without the aid of a bullet.

One star I know is best described by what I heard a young man say while looking at her photograph:

"She looks as if a knife were in her heart and she herself were turning and twisting it to see how hard she could make it hurt."

This was a most adequate statement of the pain the woman's character really brought to her. She had been, as a girl, an inmate of a house of ill repute in a small city, and a manager of a traveling company, "seeing the town" one night, had become enamored of her and taken her away with his company. Of course she climbed, but she is, and always has been, for all I know to the contrary, one of the most wretched of women. Not content with being unhappy herself, she seems set and determined to cause every one who comes within her aura as much misery as she bears, and, unfortunately, she is in a position to indulge this desire (I was going to say "to her heart's content," but that one word "content" never figures in such a life) at least to what she considers a degree of satisfaction; for a certain number of people accept their daily bread from her, annually, in the shape of salaries.

At another time I was associated in a company with Mrs. Im. Biber's daughter. This girl was at that time in the small twenties and yet quite as hopeless a drunkard as her more brilliant mother had been at fifty. Miss Biber did not come under

the head of a "virtue poser," but very boldly changed her male protector (save the mark) with each engagement. She always carried about with her and enthroned on the bureau in her hotel room a large photograph of the lordly knight who first persuaded her that "love was the only tie which rightly binds." It snapped its cords, in his case, before a whole year had passed over their heads, and although numerous others had since taken his place, apparently there was a romantic attachment for this one man in her heart that bade fair to last all her life.

Again, in another company, I hear fitful sighs and murmurs of "poor Riena, poor girl," and I look at a beautiful amazon bejeweled like a princess, gowned like a Parisian goddess, groomed like a racer, yet with tears streaming down her cheeks, gnawing her lips, clasping and unclasping her nervous fingers, and someone is saying:

"Has he been a brute again? It's just a shame he can't give you a little peace." And I hear from the fawning winkers that one of the wealthiest and gayest men about town is not only keeping her in her professional position, which enables her to play all season in New York, changing theatre or production as the success or the failure of a piece she may be cast in necessitates, but also supplying her with automobiles, diamonds, gowns, and a large quantity of misery.

Yet what would you? A girl is ambitious, and this is the kind of woman to whom managers give the preference. Let me illustrate.

One day I visited the office of Bigbunch on an errand for Miriam. I was a very welcome guest in those times, always politely bowed to by the office boys and gallantly escorted into one of the private offices of the "most high." On the occasion in point, the particular "most highness" I wished to see greeted me kindly and asked me to wait in his inner office a moment, as he was busy casting a play with Mr. Authorman.

"Miss Prudence Gray, Mr. Authorman; Miss Gray is one of our most valued artists. Just in here, Miss Gray, if you please, and I'll see you in a moment." I entered the inner office, and as no pains were taken to close the door between the rooms I naturally heard every word of the conversation which ensued. Nor was it made apparent that I should not hear, for there was no lowering of voices.

Mr. Authorman was pleading the cause of his favorite character in his new play which the firm of Bigbunch was to put on for him. He mentioned, as his ideal of the part, a young woman whom I remembered to have seen that winter in a road company. She was playing an ingenuous character in which she had made a splendid impression. I recalled how charming we thought her and we went behind the scenes after a matinée performance to congratulate her. We found her a sweet, shy girl

who had really not yet learned how clever she was. I mentally congratulated Mr. Authorman upon his good taste, but was in no way surprised to hear the "most high" bring his fist down on the table emphatically and cry out:

"No, Siree! Why good God, man, that girl is one of those 'Virgin Marys' (again the worst of stigma) she couldn't work for me if she paid me. No, siree! Here is a great part, and it's worth money. We want a New York name and a woman who can get the cash for the production. Now there is Miss Lurineye; she's clever and has a big Wall Street following. Why all you have to do is to say to her, 'dearie, do you think you can manage to get me so many thousand dollars by noon to-morrow'? She jumps into a cab, gets mixed up in those high buildings down town, and, presto, the money is ours. She's on my salary list regular."

"But," persisted Mr. Authorman, "this is the character of a most spiritual woman and this Virgin Mary, as you term her, has just the temperament for it."

"Rot!" from the "most high." "They are all actresses ain't they? They ought to be able to play those spiritual temperaments as well as the devil's. This girl will do the spiritual act all right. You ought to see her raise her eyes to heaven over the rim of a glass of champagne. ——! you'd think she was an angel. Besides, I can't bear that kind of a ninny. Let them press-agent their baby innocence

to their heart's content, I don't mind so long as it ain't the real article. But when it is, it gets on my nerves. No, sir, I don't want any women on my pay roll I can't make use of, nor that I can't count on to get me money when I need it, and this spiritual kind of yours would faint if you even kissed her. Now then, about what we spoke of yesterday; you've got to work in some society wall flowers in that third act, at least five or six."

"But," again Mr. Authorman protested, "I always supposed it best to keep a cast small and so save salaries and traveling expenses."

"Usually," returned the "most high," "but there are always a lot of girls about who dress swell and don't expect much in the way of salaries and who have a following; so I have to keep them busy. It helps business. They more than bring in at the box office what little their traveling expenses cost."

I record this conversation because the firm employed many women as you see. Were they all Rienas or Miriams? I cannot say, I only give you the statement of one of the "most high" that there were no women on his salary list who would not be useful in other ways than acting.

Further than this I will give you another incident which was even more personal; that of a business proposition made to me by a New York manager whereby I was to be "featured" in a play, if I would get the backing from some of the various men he

would introduce me to; remembering only, that on affairs of the heart he was to have a monopoly.

This experience, now brings me back to Miriam whose subsequent history I will give you as briefly as possible, yet feeling that I should give it even at the risk of monotony, since I have made the statement that she stands for a type, if not an actual composite of so many women I have met, and at least as she appears in the public eye, as the ideal of the ambitious struggling young woman.

Gladly would I write that this beautiful girl arose from her three months' siege of brain fever a wiser, better woman. Almost anyone would have exclaimed: "sin itself has taught me not to sin," but not so insatiable ambition. Her experience of that four years taught her only one lesson, opened to her view but one new phase of life; men evidently used women as it suited their selfish convenience, it was then a woman's turn to use men with just as little consideration. And this she set about to do. If any honest propositions came to her, engagements offered on the strength of what name she had made by the advertising she received from Bigbunch, I never knew of them. She doubtless looked with a worldly eye and knew that whichever way she turned the conditions offered her would be the same, if she was to climb in her profession, and that was her one desire, so she eventually chose the one which offered the greatest inducements.

Be that as it may, before the next season had advanced to cold weather, Miriam, recovered from her illness, was announced as the head of an ultra-metropolitan company under the sponsorship of one of its most exclusive managers; a man whom she had known for some time. That even the strange thing which they call love, existed in this alliance I feel decidedly was not a fact. He was useful to her in her ambition, she to him because she was young, beautiful, and had been adored by a younger, handsomer man than himself, and it flattered him to be able to know that his world, at least, considered she belonged to him; she was moreover attractive to others, and "thereby hangs a tale."

¶ Miriam, however, never lost that pride, nor vanity, which demanded that the world, outside her walls, should pay her homage as a good woman. Great was the press work the years she reigned a theatrical queen about "her charities, her interest in aspiring girls, her missions, her church, her beautiful home in which were established a happy mother and sister, enjoying the goods the gods had given through the earnest efforts of this talented young woman who, by striving, by patiently working and waiting at Fame's threshold, had achieved such heights of glory."

Her city home and summer cottage on Long Island were often elaborately written about and photographed with the mother, sister, and myself happily sitting on piazzas and in cozy living rooms

with the famous, beautiful, and domestic-loving actress, and made the subject of whole page articles in magazines appealing especially to the modest housewife and conventional young person.

This city home, which Miriam bought, or rather her manager gave her, was a beautiful house on one of the delightful drives overlooking the Hudson river, and here she lived with her mother, sister, and, for a time, myself, for she was loyal to her friends, at least she was to me, and I, having nursed her through that awful crisis, felt I could not leave her now. Here she instituted, after a time a sort of Sunday evening salon, and many men of brilliant minds assembled in her drawing rooms as well as all the lights, both masculine and feminine, of her own profession. Here I came most intimately to know the *modus operandi* or the business workings of the fraternity; for it is in the social side that nearly all arrangements have their inception. The manager; the backer; the star are so mixed and mingled in these gatherings, one can almost see the wheels go round of any production in town. Yet such a strict veneer and semblance of respectability was adhered to that even I, living in the bosom of the family, would have to rub my eyes to realize which was the real and which the pseudo condition that was being lived.

Mr. Knave, Miriam's manager, had a suite of rooms at one of the most prominent hotels and never, by any question of a sign, was he connected

with our household. True, he would sometimes stay at the house over night, but so did other men and other women for that matter, the house being a large one with plenty of spare room, since our family was small, and often the wee hours of the morning at which our Sunday night parties would break up made it inconvenient for several to get home. I believe this arrangement is not considered an act of impropriety in homes of people of social standing. However, that our parties were void of that Bohemian spirit which makes such gatherings tolerable to the men who frequent them, I am forced to admit was not the case. Many of our guests often did not return to their homes because they had "looked too long upon the wine when it sparkled," and, while I never witnessed at Miriam's house any such orgies as are chronicled in papers regarding dinners in which chorus girls and Paris beauties figured in unsavory lights, yet the stories at these assemblies were not always delicate, and while men about town did not bring their wives, they only too often brought some other man's, and always the woman they were especially protecting; the latter usually being an actress moving professionally in Miriam's own class.

What happened at other soirées given in return for this hospitality to Miriam by the various persons whom I met at her house, I am unable to say, for I never went to any of them. I was always a wet blanket, really tolerated only because of what Miriam

was pleased to think I had done for her in standing by her in her trouble and illness, and I am afraid this fact, coupled with other things, led to my seeking pastures new.

That we had "scenes" at our Sunday night literary (?) gatherings (I say literary, for each individual persuaded himself that he moved in these salons because of the higher, broader thoughts of the people he met there than he could find in the narrow minds of his more conventional associates) I must freely admit, and that it was often difficult to keep them out of the papers you have only to ask our hard worked press agent. Once, through the pique of an ex-visitor who had become so aggressive that it was necessary to refuse him admittance, we were nearly raided as a gambling resort, but this little episode was neatly screened by the vigorous work of the afore-mentioned clever writing commodity.

Once we came near to having a tragedy during the last year I spent with Miriam prior to joining other companies. One of the beautiful women playing in a rival theatre was known to us plainly and absolutely as the special protection of a wealthy and rather brilliant man, although both were unmarried.

One day we were quite surprised to read in the society notes of a daily paper that this man was about to be married to a beautiful and accomplished girl in his own walk of life. We naturally fell to speculating, in a quiet way, what would be the outcome for Lucie. The Sunday following this announcement he and

Lucie came to Miriam's about eleven o'clock in the evening, and he seemed more attentive to her, more sincerely in love with her, than we ever supposed him to be. The announcement, we reasoned, must have been a mistake.

Again the papers were busy. This time they told us that the lovely bride to be had suddenly become unreasonably jealous of a certain pretty actress who was playing in town, but whom Mr.—Man—about—town utterly denied ever having met.

Then came a Sunday edition with a double page, revealing the romance of Lucie and a certain popular young actor who was rapidly coming to the front and who, indeed, would be launched upon the sea of "Stardom," to be accompanied in such an event by his lovely bride, Lucie Intrigue, to whom he had been secretly married for nearly a year. There were pictures of the actor in various rôles; there were pictures of Lucie in beautiful poses; a deliciously, romantically compiled article altogether.

A few weeks later appeared pictures and articles of the wedding of Mr.—Man—about—town and the young society lady.

Mr. Actor and Lucie now graced our table, and we saw nothing more of Mr.—Man—about—town. It really looked for some time as if theirs had been a most romantic and tender love affair, and I supposed them to be extremely happy. One Sunday night, not many months after their marriage had been made public, they came to Miriam's quite late, and it was most

palpable that Lucie was extremely nervous and Mr. Actor almost fighty in his conduct.

Their attitude put a general air of depression over us all, and a sense of alarm, such as one feels in the gathering of a heavy storm, seemed to pervade the atmosphere to such an extent that every time the butler entered to usher in a visitor we all started as if in apprehension.

The being we all dreaded, though none knew why, came at last and proved that our fears had not been groundless. Mr. Man-about-town, flushed with liquor, almost disheveled in appearance, and rudely waiting for no one to open the door of the drawing room for him, bolted in and stood before us.

Without noticing any greeting, he glared at Lucie and cried:

"So you are here, are you? and that puppy too, eh? Why didn't you stay at home when I told you to?"

She sat calmly at her table not even letting her cards fall from her jeweled hands.

"Because I did not choose to do so," she answered clearly.

"Is that so?" he sneered. "Well, I'll let you know how to choose," and he made a step towards her.

Several men took hold of him, begging him not to make a scene, but he shook them off roughly.

"I know what I'm doing," he hotly exclaimed, "she owes me more than an apology and she knows it. And you," turning to Mr. Actor who sat perfectly

still, "you, ———, owe me something which you'll pay. I hired you to *marry* her, not to love her, no, ———, nor to live with her."

Lucie now rose, and taking the drunken man by the arm, tried to lead him from the room, but he brutally threw her against one of the tables, and whipping a revolver from his pocket he again addressed Mr. Actor:

"Who's putting up for your ——— starring tour, I'd like to know? And you dare to let me find you in Lucie's room and when I leave for a minute to try and steady my nerves after what I saw, you sneak over here and hope to escape. I said I'd kill you then, and by ——!"

We had none of us even screamed when the revolver showed itself, and now we hardly moved when the report of a shot rang through the room. Fortunately it had gone wild of its mark and imbedded itself in a mahogany table in a corner of the room. Before the staggering crazy man could pull the trigger again, Lucie had thrown herself in his arms, calling him all sorts of endearing names, which seemed to calm and sooth him instantly, for the revolver fell from his hand, and in a moment he was sobbing on her neck like a child.

How their affair ever ended I do not know. Lucie is as yet Mrs. Actor, and Mr. Actor is still a star. The beautiful society wife is often pictured in magazines, sometimes with her lovely little daughter, but you know quite as much about them now as I do.

CHAPTER XIX.

“SEAMED O’ER BY THE SCARS HIS OWN SABRE HAD
MADE.”

I have said I was a member of Miriam’s household for a time, largely because she felt she owed me a debt, but as I entertained no such thought, I decided eventually to seek other surroundings, partially because I did not fit neatly into these, but principally because the change in Miriam was becoming more than I could bear to witness, and I determined to go with other managements for a while. It was while seeking another engagement that I received the brilliant (?) offer which I have mentioned to be “featured” if the conditions as presented were accepted. I do not doubt that I failed to find it alluring because I had only that week left a house built on this kind of foundation.

And what had been the result? An erst-while lovable, gentle, enthusiastic nature was now hardening into flinty, bitter, selfishness which was solidifying all it came in contact with. Nothing that was ever done for her, now, was received by Miriam with a smile or sign of approval. It was never right, no matter what pains the doer took for her in the doing, until she thoroughly convinced herself that all people

with whom she had to deal were in league against her to try her patience; of which commodity she had not an atom left. Furthermore, experience had taught her so zealously to guard her professional position, which she knew only too well could be wrenched from her by a small glance from a luring eye, that the theatre was a most disagreeable place to be in, with her constant disapproval of this girl or that woman; the almost instant dismissal of any very young woman who might be foolish enough to show promise. After this kind of offender was safely off the salary list, long articles would appear in the papers supposed to emanate from her intellectual pen, giving advice to aspiring girls on how to succeed on the stage, always helpful, full of good cheer and encouragement, provided the girl was willing to give up all for art, to live an abstemious life, never to indulge in late suppers, not to go about too much in a social way, and above all to be patient, persevering, and to work.

I have seen my once happy, generous-hearted little friend actually pull some bows or ribbons off the dress of a girl she thought looked prettier than herself, and nag and scold at another because she would inadvertently turn her face so that the audience might get a short glimpse of it once in awhile, and I heard her one night say to this innocent offender, under her breath, while a scene was going on:

"If you don't turn your back to the audience when you say that speech I'll slap your face right before them."

A cold, unsympathetic, bitter, calloused, calculating woman was this petted, envied servant of the public, and I ask you why? She had started out upon her career with quite a degree of talent and an abnormal amount of ambition. She had attained heights which apparently satisfied ambition, and yet this is what it had done for her. Could she be happy even if she knew nothing of the discomforts luxury cannot alleviate? She had not one of the elements of happiness in her character, as it was dwarfed and twisted then, and she still suffered in a dull, dead, apathetic way that even the old vent to hysteria did not relieve.

It was when I finally did secure another engagement (not so hard a task now, as my association with "big people" made me seem of value to lesser ones) I found, as I have already stated, that Miriam stood only as a type of almost hundreds I came daily to know. I might change companies, management, but seldom, if ever, conditions. They repeated themselves with clock-like precision, only that usually in the more unpretentious and mediocre companies I met the ambitious, struggling man or girl who had not yet wholly learned to be a winker, and who was looking up at the gilded and alluring niches occupied by the apparently successful ones, full of conviction that their efforts would lead them, too, to such positions of fame if they were only faithful, only worked hard, for it is, alas, these aspiring minds who devour most hungrily the articles of advice written or dictated by such women as Miriam.

It was in one of these mediocre companies I chanced to meet the "Virgin Mary" whom "Most High" had so peremptorily refused to cast. She was still struggling, now a leading woman in a melodrama, now in a stock house, bearing the innumerable hardships and unsympathetic treatment from wingers and transgressors alike which I had myself tasted and knew the bitterness of; yet doggedly hopeful that if she could only get a New York chance her troubles would be over. I never told her how near she had come to reaching the longed-for goal, nor the reason the management gave when refusing to cast her in a part for which the author himself considered her temperamentally ideal.

Just here I wish to say although I have dedicated this book to young women, it is only too true that they are not alone persecuted nor morally endangered by the conditions of this profession. Boyish young fellows entering such an environment are easy prey to women whose years, sometimes, almost double theirs, and who, through drink or morphine, present so pitiful a spectacle that the young man's sympathy is aroused, and through a beginning of kindly solicitude, he is soon the abject slave of the sensual, debauched creature he may have tried to help. I have in mind just such a case of a beautiful woman not yet in her fortieth year. But her attacks of "nervous prostration," the technical term which covers her breakdowns from drugs, are becoming so

frequent now that she will soon be out of the way of causing any more mischief.

The subtle part of such a situation as this, is that this woman does not *mean* any harm to a living soul, and one is so tremendously deceived by her physical suffering, her patent unhappiness, that he readily gives sympathy and offers a helping hand. Yet, it is utterly impossible to come within her influence and not be contaminated. She rejects the helping hand that would lead her to a better command of herself, but grasps eagerly at the sympathy upon which she plays until she brings its giver to some such of level as her own.

Another woman not yet so debauched, but morally lawless, when she heard of a young man in the profession, of really model life and principles, braggingly exclaimed:

"Just give me six months and see what I'll do."

She succeeded in becoming a member of the company in which he was playing, and before three months had passed he was completely enamored of her and gallantly stood by her when she managed by her actions to have herself and him ejected from a first-class hotel in the small hours of the morning.

In fact this anomaly has appealed to me very strongly in all I have observed. A pure ray breaking into an atmosphere of vice puts the latter in a state of exceeding unrest. Far from permitting the poor little ray to travel its own path unmolested, there seems to be a general concentration of forces to cause

it to become a part of the atmosphere which it has entered. Failing in this, the energy is then turned towards ejecting it, and, like the oyster which forms a pearl over the particle that is irritating it, this element of vice works and labors until the pure ray is forced to retire through the little crevice from whence it came and is heard of no more.

At the beginning of a week's engagement in a city in the middle West, one season, I came in touch with a situation which is one of the most pathetic and pitiful instances I have met. Our train arrived at noon, Sunday, and as I entered my room at the hotel the chamber-maid was putting some towels on the stand and remarked:

"You're some of the show folks, ain't you?" and without waiting for an answer went on:

"Did you go to Elizabeth Brilliant's funeral this morning?" interrogating me as is the habit with American servants. I did not answer; I could not. A great lump rose in my throat and almost choked me. I felt the tears spring to my eyes, and I think I even trembled with the emotion we feel when we hear of the demise of a friend. This jabbering woman had mentioned in a careless, common place way, a name that even then, after all I had witnessed and experienced in the profession, was surrounded by a sort of romantic atmosphere I felt was almost sacred. Miss Brilliant was my "Juliet" of long years ago; my ideal; the one great actress of my girlhood's home. That name had been a household word in

nearly all our New England district. I then thought it was because the possessor of it was so much above any other, even talented, being that she had crept into our hearts by the right of recognition to genius. Not a house in our neighborhood, but had a small profile head of her, colored and printed on a stiff card, a picture which was used for years as a trade mark. How each family happened to be its happy possessor I never questioned, but I suppose now they must have been sent through some mailing list. When finally she had condescended to appear in our small city, I had fallen literally her adorer, and nothing in life was beautiful nor good but to follow in her illustrious footsteps.

She was dead; her funeral had been held in this city just a few hours before my arrival.

"I went," continued the woman, not waiting for my answer, "and it was funny."

I sat up very straight, and I know my eyes must have flashed with the indignation which burned within me.

"What do you mean?" I demanded; and it must have been in a most dramatic tone, for the woman jumped as if I had shot her.

"Why," she gasped, stopping her work to stare at me, "I mean it was just an awful scene. She was laid out in her dress that she used to wear in Juliet—all pearls and white satin and real pretty, but you know she drank so hard towards the last that she was just awful bloated and her face was a sight."

"Oh!" I moaned, my heart beating wildly, "you don't know that she drank. How can you say so?"

"I don't know?" echoed my tantalizer, giving her head a toss as she began vigorously to tuck in the white bedspread. "Humph, I guess I knew her better'n you ever did, if you are an actress like she was. Why she used to wash dishes in this very hotel, and I was doing chamber work just as I am now."

I sank back in my chair with all the spirit of defense creeping away from me. I did not want to hear what must follow, yet I found no words to say so. The now thoroughly aroused ex-companion-at-labor of my artistic goddess was talking so rapidly I probably could not have stopped her had I tried.

"Yes, siree, she worked here for a long time, but I never so much as spoke to the likes of her. The kids in the street where she lived used to call her 'Dirty Lizzie,' and her father was the lowest down drunkard in Back Alley. Why, Lizzie used to go to dance halls and what you call dives; and somewhere, one time, she met a man who belonged to a repertory show, what they call a ten, twenty, and thirty cent snap, and he took her away. Next we knowed, some three or four years after, we seen her pictures all over every place, and she wasn't Liz Brennan any more, but had that high-falutin' name she was buried by. Some manager in New York got struck on her and starred her, and say if he wasn't the slick advertiser. He had newspapers even in this very city say that she

was the daughter of a clergyman and most highly 'complished. Say, that girl couldn't write her own name when she left here, and I don't believe she ever did learn. Well, she was great and high up for a good many years; then I guess she quarreled with her manager because I read something about him suing her, or her him, and he gave her away and told how he had to teach her to speak the queen's English when he first took her up. Then it came out that she'd married someone, and the manager didn't like it because she was *his* girl. Well she didn't stay married to that man long, and then if we wasn't flabbergasted to read some while after that she'd married a millionaire. But, oh laws! didn't his family cut up about it. And then she got to drinking so hard he had to let her go." Part of this last I knew; that about the marriage to the millionaire, and I had thought it only a just and fitting reward after all her years of beautiful service to her art. The earlier instances must have happened while I was just beginning in the profession, and she had been off the stage for some time. I knew that a few seasons ago she returned for a while, but I supposed it was because she could not be happy away from her work.

"And you went to her funeral to-day?" I managed to say as if it was expected of me before the climax would be vouchsafed.

"Yes I did," she almost snapped, "and I tell you it was a queer affair. There wasn't a mourner except her old drunken father, and he only blubbered and

drulled the way he always does when he's so awful full. Dirty Lizzie never done nothing for him, all right, and I can't see that he had no call to mourn for her. The minister just read a service over her and didn't make no remarks and then they put her in the hearse, and it and a carriage started for the graveyard followed by the awfulest ragtag and bobtail crowd you ever seen of neighbors who used to live near them in Back Alley. I didn't go to the graveyard, but my friend, the girl who has the floor above, did, and she told me the scene at the grave was just pitiful with a ragged mob scrambling to get a peep at the coffin as it was lowered into the ground.

"I don't object that she was so famous, and I guess she was a grand actress all right, but she never *did* behave herself and wasn't what I call a fine woman worth a cent. Why didn't she pull up when she was doing so fine and try and make a lady of herself? But, no sir. Dirty Lizzie she was even in silks and satins and di'monds, and drunken, dirty Lizzie she died."

A great deal of it was vindictive jealousy that the silks, satins, and diamonds had fallen to the ex-dishwasher's lot, but alas, the letter and spirit of truth was most evidently behind that simple statement that she lived at all times true to her ragamuffin cognomen. The woman now flounced out of my room with an air of triumph which plainly said:

"Just put that in your noddle and remember it," and I could only stare blankly into space as again a panorama of all these theatrical years of mine passed before me, and I muttered sadly again and again:

" 'And thou, Brutus!' and it was *this* woman who had first given my artistically thirsting soul its aspiration."

From my various wanderings on the road, I would hear of Miriam shining in her lofty sphere, but, of course, now that I was no longer intimately associated with her, I heard only the worst, as was usual with all the gossip of our fellow-workers when we were not in their companies. Business of the theatre in which she was supreme began to wane, as we could tell by numerous changes in the plays. Then I heard gradually of a new ingenue who had made a hit in the company (or at least one who was receiving some advertising), and I began to wonder what were the changes now coming over this dream of Miriam's. Now appeared little items in the papers as to her health which seemed to be anything but robust. Again I would catch a bit of mouth from mouth gossip about a certain club man (who I knew frequented the Sunday night salons) and the possibility of his wife making a scandal if certain affairs went on. This man's money, I knew, had for years played an important part in the running of Mr. Knave's business interests, and I began to realize that Miriam was perhaps a second time in the throes of the inevitable results which follow in the pathway of all this un-

scrupulous manœuvring, and I felt it my duty, for the sake of the girl I had known so long ago, to return to New York and, if possible, render her what assistance lay in my power.

What a change I found in this young woman of only about thirty-six years of age yet so evidently being consumed by some fatal disease. The bitter flintiness had hardened into almost a coarseness, but she assumed a kittenish, childish clinging which sat most unbecomingly on her now much too rounded figure. She seemed to feel that her ground was slipping from under her feet, and evidently attributing it to the years creeping on apace, she was endeavoring by all kinds of wiles to be the girl of old. But herein she erred. Her unattractiveness came not at all from any trace of age, but was simply the effect of an unlovable character.

When I reached her, she apparently felt a new truce had come for her, and she grasped at me as a drowning man catches at a straw.

"You are still young, well, and pretty," she babied me, "I don't see how 'um does it. You go to Knave and smile at him and try and spoil 'at nasie 'ittle cat Genus Feline's game."

So I learned at once that the ingenue was making headway in spite of Miriam's vigilance. But the thing which was eating her heart out, I found a few days later, was the old, old cry of that foolishly unreasonable hobby, "her good name."

Mr. Knave came to the house one day with a newspaper article which looked very bad for all concerned and that had evidently emanated from the wife of Mr. Clubman.

Miriam once more paced the floor like a tigress and loudly refused to be the heroine of a scandal.

"Say anything you will, do anything, I simply will not bear this aspersion. Good God! it's been hard enough fighting to keep my reputation so far and to lose it now to that little milksop just because she happens to be married to him, I won't have it. I simply won't."

Between them they dictated some kind of interview for the press agent which held Miriam up as the most abused and innocent of women. But even this did not appease her, and she would talk by the hour of the wickedness of this jealous wife who was trying to sully her character in the eyes of the public.

The end came sooner than I expected; scarcely a month after I arrived in New York. Rehearsals were in progress for a new play, the second that season, and Miriam, who would hardly let me out of her sight, insisted that I should accompany her to the theatre both for the evening performances and rehearsals.

I saw now without the necessity of anyone to explain things, how matters were trending. A stage manager, who, when I left, had been bobbing and bowing at her beck and call, was now giving Miriam thinly veiled, sarcastic remarks about her conception of her rôle in the new play, "possibly fitting the days

when we were younger, but art had progressed, and would she please kindly do it this way now." Then with the very next stage direction his *manner* said: "and if you do not please, do it anyway."

I was amazed at Miriam's attitude; she moved about as he dictated, only now and then trying, with a piteous effort to baby talk him into a better humor, but the effort irritated him sadly, and I can hardly wonder at it. In the reading of her lines her voice was only a tearful monotone, and her actions were lax and colorless, except for the kittenish mannerism which had crept even into her work. Yet it was very clear that her spirit was gone; either from illness of body or mind, but perhaps from a large mixture of both.

The other, or climbing, side of the situation, I managed to observe quite clearly in that "nasie 'ittle cat Genus Feline." This young woman was all dimples and smiles, and everything was most evidently going her way, for the stage manager "dearied" her, and the winkers were fawning about her, and there was a sparkle and dash about it all which always bubbles and effervesces in the first stages of triumph. She was sillily polite to Miriam, who was as foolishly brusque in her treatment of her; for as yet there was no definite certainty that Miss Merriworld had been dethroned so far as Mr. Knave was concerned.

At the third rehearsal I attended, I witnessed the breaking of Miriam's second whirlwind, but this time it finished its work and could never gather again.

Rehearsal was progressing smoothly when I noticed that Miriam became nervous and fidgety, and I felt a consciousness of the absence of Genus Feline; at least, she was not where she could be seen. Putting her typewritten part into my hand, Miriam whispered:

"If Sneerer (the stage manager) asks for me, say I'll be back in a moment;" and she slipped away towards that part of the theatre where Mr. Knave had his office.

Mr. Sneerer did call Miriam when her cue came, and I delivered her message. He was very much annoyed and stopped rehearsal to wait for her. Ordinarily, he would have gone on with some other scene in which she was not concerned, as is the custom if the stage manager is kindly disposed. Minutes passed. They seemed like years as one could almost hear the beating of her own heart in the stillness which settled upon us. Just as the strain had become almost unbearable, and I felt that in another instant I would fetch Miriam myself, she came upon the stage through the door from the front of the house.

Her face was ashen gray; her eyes seemed dull and lusterless; and she almost staggered as she walked.

Mr. Sneerer rose to his feet and shouted at her:

"This is a most unprofessional way to treat your stage manager, Miss Merriworld. If you can't attend to business better than this we'll see what—"

Something pitiful in her manner seemed to touch even him, and he lowered his voice and changed his tone to an almost gentle:

"Your first entrance in the second act, please."

Miriam took her part from me and strode across the imaginary entrance to the table set left of center, at which her part directed she should sit. Just as she reached the chair beside it, she evidently started to read the lines which accompany that stage direction, but instead she threw up her arms in a gesture of wild despair, and from her heart, her pent-up, mistreated, wounded soul, came the most awful, piercing shriek it has ever been my unhappy lot to hear.

"The damned cry that way in Hell," I misquoted Romeo in the psychological instant when we all stood transfixed by that appalling sound, and then another, a soft, airy fluttering and rustling of silk, and I knew she had sought a relief from her woes a second time in unconsciousness.

Some one who came in from the office side of the building gave an incoherent statement to the effect that Miriam had tried to go into Mr. Knave's office and found the door locked and had hidden herself in the recess of the hall and had seen him open the door and look stealthily out; that Miss Merriworld had evidently sprung from her hiding place before he was aware and forced her way past him into the room where was also Miss Feline.

We lifted Miriam up and revived her, and I took her home in her own carriage. She was absolutely apathetic, only sighing now and then, listlessly folding and unfolding her fingers.

When she had rested a few hours, she told me that there had been a dreadful scene. She knew well when she sprang into the room, by all familiar signs of awkwardness and blushes, that she had interrupted a "love scene" when she knocked on the door, and she now demanded of this man, to whom she had given the best years of her life, helping him in his business and finances, ever as he had willed, this man whom she never had loved, yet in whom rested all her material hopes, what was to be the outcome of this new alliance and what kind of position was she to count on in the company. She was very calmly informed that the *public* had tired of her, and Knave felt a change in the personnel of the organization would be beneficial and that Miss Feline had accepted the position of leading woman for the ensuing season.

Miriam tried to make her defense on the grounds that the public was still her friend. Mr. Knave then cited the lowering cloud of scandal which hung over her and which would undoubtedly ruin a playhouse of the reputation which he held if, by any chance, it should break, and for that, if nothing further, she should see it was best she retire from his management.

"It was that," she moaned, in telling me, "which took from me all power of speech. I could not answer him, the situation had so much of effrontery in it, but I left them together, she, that cat, having heard him say this awful thing to me. And then it came to me in all its enormity, as I started to rehearse again, that he could calmly sit there and shamelessly speak of our

affair with Clubman in that way, when he knew, none so well as he, that it all came about from his building the new theatre and from my getting the money for him from this man."

This, then, was the "most unkindest cut of all"; that she should have, in aiding this man, brought upon herself almost an open scandal while he who had profited by the very conditions which caused it could deliberately berate her for it and claim it as an excuse to discharge her.

She made no attempt nor struggle for a new foothold now as she had done when the crash came with Bob Idolized.

"I'm tired and sick," she said, when someone suggested her career was by no means ended, simply because one manager considered her no longer of use to him. "I'm tired and sick, and the game isn't worth the candle. If I start at it again it means the same kind of intrigue, of false living, and I'm not as ambitious as I was fifteen years ago. The glamor is off it all now. It hasn't been worth it. It hasn't been worth it all."

Her one thought was to regain her health. She seemed to feel she might now know a little peace as though she had been set free as from a thralldom, if she were only well and strong. To this end she and her mother and sister traveled extensively, but with very poor results so far as gaining the desired health was concerned. The angry red spot on her face kept spreading, and the disease which was consuming her

struggled desperately to accomplish its fatal work. How she had spent money when she was obtaining it or what she had saved I never knew, but it was soon announced that she was financially embarrassed. She had gone with her family to the far West as a last resort, thinking they could live more quietly there. For some time she had the rent of the town house. Whether she never really owned the house or what kind of "string" Mr. Knave always held on it, I never knew. At all events, Miriam was suddenly deprived of even its rent, and as she never made a legal fight to regain its possession I judge she knew she had no claims to it, other than those very untrustworthy ones based on a man's caprice.

When she had been bedridden for some time, I was startled one day, while playing in the South, to read in a morning paper that "Mr. Knave, the famous manager, was arranging a monster benefit for an esteemed, beloved and noble woman of the profession, who was lying on a bed of pain fighting for health in the far away but invigorating climate of the West, reduced almost to want and penury." Columns followed, more press work almost daily, expiating on her upright, womanly character, her unusual talent, her high position in the esteem of all who had loved her in her days of fame and glory. There was much about her great charitable heart; about the fact that a catastrophe never came to a community, that a misfortune never came to a fellow-worker, that hers was not the first hand raised to aid and comfort; and

the public, which this man on that fatal day when Miriam was dethroned, had told her was weary of her, was now called upon to come to her rescue. In fact, to be as brutally candid as were these people among themselves who were arranging this benefit scheme, "the sympathy for a good woman dodge was worked to a finish," and the net result of the wearied public's great heart and gullibility was several thousand dollars.

What Miriam's debts were, I do not know, nor am I prepared to say what portion of the amount raised Mrs. Merriworld had the handling of. Miriam lived but a few months longer, and was not only decently, but elegantly buried. Yet, when her affairs were finally settled, there was nothing left for the maintenance of her mother or sister, who had been her constant charges. However, this ex-manager of our ill-fated Miriam had succeeded at last in getting the public to bury his derelict for him and once more bear out the statement that a theatrical manager risks his own money, *never*, if he can help it.

"The way of the transgressor *is* hard." Oh, so hard, that I can scarcely keep back the tears when I see the reckless, the youthful, plunging into it helter-skelter, hit or miss, seeing only the glamor, the seeming and deadly blind to the awful results. Yet they will gaily tell you, if you try to suggest a pause, "No one else's bump will do. My own bump alone will convince me." But bumps there are sure to be; terrible

in the extreme if they yield and go with the tide as it is flowing now; bitter, ripe with disappointments, with blighted hopes if high ideals of early teaching hold them to the shores of conventionality.

So I say to you now in the shadow of Miriam's grave, if you know a girl or woman with ambition's bee in her bonnet and an earnest conscientious soul, take this from me, coming as it does out of twenty years of experience in these conditions:

"IF SHE WISHES TO START A LITTLE HELL ON HER OWN HOOK," JUST LET HER GO ON THE STAGE.

EPILOGUE.

How bitterly cruel that all this is true, I have said to myself again and again. No more beautiful art exists than that of characterization and story "embracing" as Charlotte Cushman has ably said: "In its exposition all other arts combined, music, dancing, color, and even sculpture in its poses and form." Yet to-day it stands upon the very last foundation it should ever, by any stretch of the imagination, occupy—*Commercialism*.

Will a play or an actor draw? That is the only consideration. Never, is the play a literary achievement, a beautiful story, or an ethical study? Nor is the actor a man of experience, of natural talent who can be relied upon to bring out all that is best of the author's thoughts. Is it a money maker? Is he a good card? These are the things that count in the estimation of the men who rule things theatrical.

"What kind of a house did you have?" one actor asks another. Seldom indeed, "What kind of performance did you give?"

This condition has largely been the outcome of the gradual elaborating of productions until now it

is quite impossible to put on a play without the outlay of many thousands of dollars and it is one of the greatest gambles as to whether it will succeed. A modest production with good acting alone as its sustaining power has come almost to spell financial suicide. People have become accustomed to having their eyes dazzled by the production, their excitement well tickled by absurd stories, built and planned solely to amuse and keep them quiet without any effort on their parts, such as thinking or reasoning, so that acting is now quite a secondary consideration, although if you suggest this to the average playgoer he is apt to have a small opinion of you and your ideas of him. Nevertheless, the constant demand of stars and managers for new plays proves this only too substantially. As soon as the theatregoer has heard the story of the play, his interest in the company is over; whereas our actors of a few decades ago played one piece many years, the public going again and again to see the same thing, enjoying and appreciating the actor's *work* and the development of characters.

The public of to-day is not to blame for its attitude for it sees according to its highest light. The great army of theatregoers in this country, at least, has been slowly, by such moderate degrees educated away from acting to personality that to-day they are quite as well satisfied with a chromo as in former times our forebears were with real paintings. This change has come about since the decline of the actor—

manager, or directing-manager; or to be more explicit the manager who directed the plays and actors which he presented to the public, and *who himself was a judge of real art* and in whose curriculum the pseudo could not possibly have had a part, since it would have been quite as distasteful to him as to the connoisseur he invited to inspect his goods.

It is undoubtedly very commendable in the peanut boy, bill poster, usher, or treasurer of a theatre to wish to rise in the world and finally branch out as a theatrical manager. The only trouble is that this kind of man wishes to do it in a hurry, and since he thinks only of the financial side, his first step is towards procuring the necessary funds with which to make the start; making no effort whatever towards qualifying himself as judge or critic of what is art and what is not. He has probably seldom watched a performance through from the front of the house, let alone studying its technique from the side behind the footlights. Possibly he reasons that a competent stage manager may be engaged to do the technical work for him, so he concerns himself with getting his "backing," and he usually accomplishes this by using a beautiful, ambitious woman for bait.

But now he finds his duty is to select the plays and engage the people to act them. He then must trust to chance and plunge; smearing his lack of knowledge with the brush of the scenic artist, the veneer of much advertising and boom. If this "hit or miss" policy happens to miss, he loudly acclaims

that his only wish is to "give the public what it wants," and he immediately plunges deeper than ever into the paint pot and gets more yards of canvas, changes the names of the "dramatis personæ" and the personality of the author.

"Here is a new play, a new cast with a gor-g-e-o-u-s production for your inspection, ladies and gentlemen, step right up and see if you will buy."

The ladies' and gentlemen's eyes are becoming a bit dazzled by the paint brush and the yards of canvas and especially the big type in the advertising, and after two or three attempts this speculating theatrical man succeeds in making a "hit." Gradually the public begins to have confidence in him and to look upon him as really a factor in its quest for amusement. He has told the people so often and pointedly, through his press agent, and on the bill boards, that his one end and aim in life is to please them that the precious public after a time begins to feel he really is their slave.

He has a favorite bit of humanity who is tugging at his coat crying: "Please star me." She isn't much to brag of, perhaps, but she "looks good to him," and so he noisily envelops her in canvas, slings the paint brush and printer's ink with reckless prodigality and says, as he draws back the curtain with a profound conviction in his every manner that brooks no dissenting voice:

"Ladies and gentlemen! I give you Miss CUTE SIMPLEBIT. Look at her. Isn't she a wonder?" And the ladies and gentlemen sit back, awed and breathless, and thank God for this good man who has given them what they want. We wiseacres behind the scenes shake our heads and murmur, "Well if he can make a star of *her* he can make bricks without a straw"; which truism flatters him almost as much as does the tinkle of the dollars that drop into his strong box.

But that his "advertising *toujours* advertising" does bring the desired hypnotic result on his public I had most clearly demonstrated to me the other day, when a young woman observed, "I do like Miss Cute Simplebit so much. She is such a dear."

"What have you seen her play?" someone asked.

"Oh, I never saw her," returned this well educated sample of Bigbunch's public, "but I've read so much about her I just love her."

The rise of the commercial manager has been so gradual, so stealthy that he has actually brought his public along with him, until now it accepts his wares as of the first water in quality, and him as the best and most competent judge of how to cater to its tastes.

Into this situation, created by the ex-peanut boy, tailor, billposter, treasurer, usher, comes the ambitious woman palpitating with a desire to display to the world the charms and talents the gods may have seen fit to bestow upon her.

Now talent is the very last commodity this commercially minded theatrical king is looking for. He can make or mar an actor in a night with his press agent, what use has he for worth?

When I say make or mar, I am thinking of a case in point of an actor I know who was positively hired with the understanding that he was to be a complete failure and so be written about all season, that the charm of the star whom he was to support, might be brought into greater prominence. As this manager has arranged matters talent is quite the least salable of articles, so in order to indulge her burning desire for fame an ambitious woman must conform to his notions and make herself useful or marketable as the manager wishes.

This may be, probably is, the private and personal business of the individuals who wish to indulge themselves. It is perhaps very true that the public is not called upon to be interested in the artist's life so long as he performs his duties on the stage to its satisfaction. The danger is that these people are not content to lead their lives as best suits them, but they persist in parading an alluring, enviable, beautiful picture of an ideal existence of true womanliness and manhood, backed by a breadth of refreshing strength of character such as an Hypatia or a Plato might be proud of, that is not only miserably, cruelly false, but does unutterable mischief by creating in the breast of the young and impressionable an almost uncontrollable desire to "arise and achieve." It

is truculently pernicious because in its effect we see only those beautiful lines of Longfellow's:

"Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime."

I look back now at the newspaper story which finally fixed my determination to try my fate, after ambition's fires had been kindled by that memorable performance of Juliet, and even gave a courage which, to me then, was so sublime that it bestowed upon me strength even to defy the will of the gentle soul who had guided me through almost all my weaker years, and from whom it eventually estranged me, so that I have been a waif for twenty wasted years. This article, of such great moment to my imaginative mind, was about the sudden rise of a lovely girl, who, happening to be passing a certain hotel in a city, stopped and said to herself:

"Here is where Mr. Greatactor (a famous star then playing in her city) is staying—I'm just going in and ask him to hear me read." "Alarmed," went on the press agent's charming story, "at her own boldness, yet with an unknown power compelling her to go forward, she soon found herself in the presence of the great personage to whom she had sent her card. He greeted her kindly, and she timidly told her mission. Behind that quivering lip, those limpid eyes, this keen observer of temperaments instantly recognized the artist's soul. And she read—some simple lines, but they were enough to show the divine spark which needed only to be kindled.

“ ‘My child,’ said the great man gently, afraid almost to reveal in his voice his pleasure in discovering so quickly a most rare talent, ‘I see there are great possibilities in you which only require proper guidance to bring them to rich fulfillment. Come to me to-morrow and I will see what I can do towards giving you a small part in my new play.’ And to-day,” goes on this weaver of fairy tales, “this young woman returns to us the leading lady of a great organization, a brilliant actress, a splendid woman, having worked with might and main to justify the faith reposed in her by so eminent an artist as Mr. Greatactor.”

How alluring! How simple! One had but to send her card to some great person, he would receive her; had but to read a scene from Juliet, Rosalind, Portia (all of which I had at my tongue’s tip), and he would tell her instantly if she had talent. If not, she could return home; if she had, oh joy unbounded! she would be given a small part to begin with, and then the work and climbing would commence.

I have known these two people, about whom that article was written, in my theatrical career. I know now that she appealed to that machine in his anatomy he is pleased to call his heart. This, however, for press purposes is spelt art by the time it gets to the public. I know, as does probably every other member of the profession, that she is exactly the same to him that Miriam was to Bob Idolized, only that the

alliance has lasted longer because she tries harder to please him and to cater to his wants, than did my poor friend. A young girl of the "Virgin Mary" type told me only two years ago that at one time she joined this man's company. The woman appeared to take a great interest in her and made a constant companion of her. At the end of the season she insisted upon taking the girl to Europe with them. This spiritual Miss (who by the way had a most beautiful shock of *real* golden hair) learned that Mr. Greatactor was in the habit of establishing a limited sort of harem each summer, and when she gently, but firmly, declined to become a member of it, this "womanly leading lady" treated her with brutal cruelty; striking her on more than one occasion and finally turning her out of doors, allowing her to get back to America as best she could. The man looked quietly on, satisfied that his agent would be able to procure him some one before the summer was over.

This girl with the golden locks never returned to the stage after that. Sensible creature to have learned her lesson in one experience!

Let me not be misunderstood as blaming the newspapers and magazines for the very misleading statements which they print daily, weekly, monthly in their stage items. These articles are usually supplied them by press agents in the employ of the various managers, and as we could scarcely expect an editor to take the time personally to investigate these stories he is truly at the mercy of the one who

gives him the news. If the press agent chooses to write a column prevaricating about a prominent person, so long as it has the celebrity's sanction, the editor is not called upon to interfere. Flattery and adulation were never known to have been the grounds for a libel suit, so that no risk is run, either, in printing such untruths. Yet this attitude of the press unconsciously constitutes the whole thing a great, enticing honey pot to poor ambitious little flies, although the intention may be only the advertising of a certain line of goods. Nevertheless, human nature is imitative, and we are all seeking the good things of life; so if we read constantly of lives of apparently one long Elysian feast we are apt to want some of the dainties.

That these magazine and paper stories do not always hang together is scarcely ever taken into account by the public. A certain manager of a very well-known and firmly established star, sends out annually a new and altogether different version of her wonderful rise to fame and the manner in which she first obtained a hearing. Perhaps he argues that "variety is the spice of life" for he surely can not forget how last year's story read, since a scrap book is kept in all well regulated manager's offices, filled with slips supplied by a clipping bureau.

One magazine article a few years ago informed us that "after the dark cloud had come into her life and she saw she must face the world and earn her daily bread, she said to her mother one day, 'I am

going on the stage, mother. I am going to New York and see Mr. DeVelop Talent, and he will coach me and bring me out. I feel it.' " She went to New York, but all efforts to meet this great developer of talent failed. At last the winter had gone, and she was still as far from the goal as ever. She read in a paper one day that this wonderful master had gone to Long Island for the summer. She, too, would go there, stay at the same hotel if possible; so to Long Island she went, and, while she saw the object of her visit occasionally taking strolls through the grounds, she found that even in his vacation he must be a very busy man, for he spent most of his time in his room writing. Finally, with beating heart, she one day timidly knocked at his door. We are told by our article that "the resonant voice which bade her enter almost reassured her, and she boldly stood in that long sought and greatly desired presence."

This master judge of temperaments also instantly recognized a genius "in the wonderful hair; the intelligent countenance; the fine eyes a glint with the light of a brilliant mind, etc., etc."

"Madame," exclaimed the master of art, "I will make you the greatest actress in the world if you will obey me, and are willing to work hard."

When this woman had started from home, in the first part of the article, it was because it was necessary for her to earn her *daily* bread. Yet with a strange manipulation in the lack of the dough from which

this bread must be baked, she spent six years in retired bliss, taking daily instruction from a man whose price for lessons was not supposed to be a "thank you kindly." However, the article goes on and brings her out at the end of those six years (which, it also tells us, were spent principally by the master pulling her about a room by the glorious hair which denoted so much talent, in order to develop that quality) as "the greatest emotional actress living." And the public largely accepted his statement "for he himself has sa-i-d it, and its greatly to his cr-e-dit" as they sing in Pinafore.

This year's story is to the effect that the lady in question followed the master around in a carriage and finally "cornered" him as he was going up the steps of his theatre and sent her maid to ask him "if he wouldn't *please* speak to her mistress who was in that carriage" and that "he turned, saw the face alight with the fire of genius gazing at him from the carriage window, and impelled by the force of her personality, raised his hat, and asked her what she wished."

The *real* history of this case may be read in the daily papers by getting out files where this woman's divorce case was one of such a character that most of the evidence was "unfit to print." Followed by a suit in the courts against an old money bag who, after paying out thousands of dollars for the first introduction of the star, tried to drop the affair; this master of stage destinies and the woman now

stood together and deliberately sued this old man for "lessons given the star to the tune of many thousand dollars," and a jury gave them a verdict for about half they asked. Of course Moneybag's defense was weak for he had a family to whom all this was a horror and a shame and they would gladly pay almost any price to save further notoriety.

The lady and her master had nothing to lose in the way of reputations and everything to gain in the matter of money, and the scheme worked beautifully.

Yet this woman is to-day patronized and encouraged by the entire American public, and what is more, is daily, monthly held up in print as the greatest example we have of what patience and perseverance will do if backed by great talent and temperament. She is quite the envy of her associates, and the light in which she stands is well expressed by a remark made by the girl in one of the companies I was with (she of the fifteen dollars a week salary and a new gown nearly every other day), "God, but I envy a woman who can hold a man as she does DeVelop Talent, and make him do for her what he does."

This woman, however, does not stand as dangerously in her success before the serious minded girl as do such types as Miriam, for even the public already knew that she came to us slimy with a scandalous divorce. It is the "virtue poser" and her defenders who are most misleading. I say defenders because let even a suspicion be breathed against

such a poser by an outsider, and the profession militant raises its voice in her behalf. Witness the squelching of Mr. Clement Scott in London when he dared to make an assertion we all knew was more than two-thirds true. Yet we howled him down, we winkers and posers alike, and, eventually, he was forced to modify his statement. Naturally, he could not prove it in individual cases. It is hard enough often for a spouse to obtain evidence against an erring partner, how then is a stranger to batter down doors to prove illicit associations of people whose lives are, after all, none of his business. And, too, when a woman whose life has been one series of moral laxity has succeeded in compassing a brilliant marriage and has found occasion to sue a paper for libel which has dared to print the truth about her and attack her "character," can cause her most prominent ex-paramour to testify for her that "their relationship was purely that of manager and artist," even giving the amount of salary she received for work behind the footlights; and when this man can go calmly out to his Bohemian associates and loftily declare that he "saved the girl and won her case for her by nobly perjuring himself like a gentleman," it becomes doubly hard to secure evidence.

Mr. Clement Scott made his statement from deduction; and that is a principle even in mathematics.

The woman of lax morals may have, undoubtedly does have, a right to live her life as it best pleases

herself so long as she does not interfere with the rights of others. But when it becomes a matter of usurping the opportunities which should be open alike to the woman who regards her character and honor as something precious, then this lawbreaker *does* interfere with the lives of others in their development and progress. I repeat the words of Miss Dainty; frothy and cynical as they sounded to me when she spoke them, they ring like clarion notes of truth to me now after twenty years proving their pertinence:

"Given two women of equal beauty and talent, one with moral scruples, the other with none, starting out to make a name and place in the world of fame; the Cerberus who keeps the gates of opportunity a man whose watchword in life is *Lust*, and the odds are not even. The fight is not fair."

I have tried to set forth as unimpassionedly as possible the web into which the spider ambition lures the unwary, and I wish to add just a few words in answer to the much used argument that "the girl of an upright, strong character may enter the theatrical profession and go through all right, accepting such advancement as may come to her honorably."

She may. It depends entirely upon what you call "all right." To keep from realizing the iniquity which constantly surrounds her would take the limitations of the deaf, dumb and blind combined; there is a constant pouring into her ears of conversation which, almost to the exclusion of every other

topic, is made up (as I heard a playwright once say) of two subjects—"Grease paint, and licentiousness." There are situations, upon which her actual living depends, which she must not only condone, but be in a measure an accessory to, and if she finally does succeed in going almost to the penitentiary door and yet manages to slip by, is she, in her memories and familiarity with that which is vile and slimy; is she, in her apathy to what goes on about her, feeling no revulsion to those things usually considered at least unconventional in the average young person's presence, in a position conducive to developing the soul beautiful or the character noble? In other words, "Is she *all right*?" Does so much rubbing up against soot and grime leave us at last pure, white, and serene?

Remember, please remember, that one woman at the height of fame and life, left all the glitter, all the glory to seek happiness in a home and that she tells us quite plainly she did so because of the direful associations of the profession which was more than her pure nature could stand. Such a woman as she was, in my profession to-day, is a jest, a laughing stock, and her life is made so great a burden to her that she is glad enough, if she wishes to continue in the calling, soon to assume the "good fellow" attitude.

The real trouble seems to be not only with us, but is growing in other walks of life too. We have expended so much sympathy on "Hester Prynne" that any ordinary adulteress who can scare up a

tear immediately appeals to our pity; and we are so bombarded with the "cast the first stone" story and have forgiven the Magdalen so often when, like Miss Melloweye, she was only shamming repentance, that she has finally become our conqueror.

Understand I have not written the conditions which surround the chorus girl. I never knew more than one or two specimens of this greatly newspaper squibbed commodity. In the publicity given to her peccadillos she seems to me to be the scapegoat of her more "posy" sister of the dramatic world. She does not find it essential to wear the "virtue cloak," but rather glories in her unsavory reputation.

That we continue to live and suffer in the conditions as I have tried to show them is partially explained by the fact that human nature is generally optimistic and there is always a lurking hope that somewhere, somehow, one will come upon the ideal existence as it *could* be lived in following an artistic career. Moreover, the smoke and roar of battle is not nearly so terrible to the soldier in the midst of it, as it is to the anxious onlooker and listener ensconced in a position of safety. Or, as I have endeavored to show the gradual, insidious, deceptive unfolding of these elements; the knowledge coming upon one not in shocks and thunders which carry warning in their very path, but with slow easy creepings which fit so gradually into the very situation with almost harmonious complacency are all so delusive that one

is really unaware of the presence of any sin until it has actually fastened its talons about him. But perhaps Pope has expressed it in a few words as only a genius can and better than volumes of more common place prose, if one would only heed him.

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

"Will you walk into my parlor?" said a spider to a fly;
"'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy.
The way into my parlor is up a winding stair,
And I have many pretty things to show you when you are there."
"O no, no," said the little fly, "to ask me is in vain,
For who goes up your winding stair can ne'er come down again."

"I'm sure you must be weary with soaring up so high;
Will you rest upon my little bed?" said the spider to the fly;
"There are pretty curtains drawn around, the sheets are fine and
thin,
And if you like to rest awhile, I'll snugly tuck you in."
"O no, no," said the little fly, "for I've often heard it said,
They *never, never wake* again, who sleep upon *your* bed."

Said the cunning spider to the fly, "Dear friend, what shall I do,
To prove the warm affection I've always felt for you?
I have within my pantry, good store of all that's nice;
I'm sure you're very welcome; will you please to take a slice?"
"O no, no!" said the little fly, "kind sir, that cannot be;
I've *heard* what's in your pantry, and I do not *wish* to *see*."

"Sweet creature!" said the spider, "you're witty and you're wise,
How handsome are your gauzy wings, how brilliant are your eyes!
I have a little looking-glass upon my parlor shelf,
If you'll step in one moment, dear, you shall behold yourself."
"I thank you, gentle sir," she said, "for what you're pleased to say,
And bidding you good-morning *now*, I'll call *another* day."

The spider turned him round about, and went into his den,
For well he knew the silly fly would soon be back again:
So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner, sly,
And set his table ready to dine upon the fly.
Then he went out to his door again, and merrily did sing,
"Come hither, hither, pretty fly, with the pearl and silver wing:
Your robes are green and purple; there's a crest upon your head;
Your eyes are like the diamond bright, but mine are dull as lead."

Alas, alas! how very soon this silly little fly,
Hearing his wily flattering words, came slowly flitting by,
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew,
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue;
Thinking only of her crested head—POOR FOOLISH THING!

At last,
Up jumped the cunning spider, and fiercely held her fast.

He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,
Within his little parlor; but she ne'er came out again!
And now, my dear young friends, who may this story read,
To idle, silly, flattering words, I pray you, ne'er give heed;
Unto an evil counselor, close heart, and ear, and eye,
And take a lesson from the tale of the Spider and the Fly.

—Mary Howitt.

APPENDIX.

Since this book has been written it has been submitted in manuscript form to a number of publishers, and I desire just a word more to the public to answer the various reasons given for the refusals to publish it.

First, word was sent me that "it (the story) was mere idle gossip and would only be read by the curious," and it was evidently dismissed on these grounds as unworthy of consideration. That this story is a series of *facts* and an exposition of the conditions existing in the theatrical world to-day; that it is the truth and nothing but the truth I can affirm. I am unable to add that it is the whole truth, for it would take many volumes to cover this inexhaustible subject.

Quite recently I came across the following in a daily paper. The remarks were made before thousands of men and women by a man whom we are led to believe has the good of humanity at heart and the saving of people's characters as a profession.

"As to drink, I never touch the stuff. * * * *
I am just as sound on the theatres. Clement Scott, the English critic, once said that a woman's promotion on the stage depends on the concessions she is pre-

pared to make. If that is true, would you like your sister to be there?"

A voice from the platform, "That isn't so in America."

"It's so everywhere, and is it conducive to the spiritual life of anybody?" Many voices replied "No," when the speaker said:

"Then you have no right to pay to expose another man's child. I know what I think of anybody who is willing to take pleasure at the expense of another's ruin. I made a statement like this once in England, and next morning there were seven actresses in my audience. They wrote and thanked me that one man had had the courage to speak out against a *system* that was robbing women of their purity."

Just read that over again, "A *SYSTEM* that is robbing women of their purity."

Again, I have been informed that while undoubtedly these conditions exist to some degree it is not expedient to bring them to the attention of the public; the least said on such matters the better.

Not So. If you saw the stream of young men and women daily, yearly rushing toward this luring siren, only to be swallowed up in the vortex as I have seen them, your very soul would cry out and demand a halt; and I have hoped in every line I have written that the serious minded will believe me, who has been in the pit, and avoid the pitfall.

If this book saves one aspiring soul from Miriam's fate or even mine, it will not have been written in vain.

